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Edited by
Masood Khoshsaligheh
Professor, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

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Evaluating ChatGPT's Performance in Creative Text Translation for Communication: A Case Study from English into German

Melissa Puppel[1]

University of Malta, Malta

Claudine Borg[2*]

University of Malta, Malta

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in using generative artificial intelligence (AI) for machine translation (MT) tasks. A notable feature of generative AI systems is prompting, through which users can provide instructions to guide the output. Prompting presents both opportunities and challenges in Translation Studies. Therefore, this study aimed to evaluate the quality of MT output generated by ChatGPT. The impact of prompting techniques on translation quality was also analyzed to gain insights into optimizing the use of generative AI in translation workflows. The study employed three prompts – zero-shot prompt, context prompt, and few-shot with context prompt – to translate a creative text for the English-German language pair. The raw MT outputs were manually annotated and the results of these annotations were compared. The results revealed that most of the errors were related to style. Interestingly, the translation produced using the simple zero-shot prompt outperformed those generated using the other two more complex prompts. However, longer prompts led to a steady reduction in stylistic and fluency errors, while accuracy errors increased.

Keywords

AI translation, machine translation, error analysis, translation quality assessment, AI prompts

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[1] https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0412-2773 | melissa.puppel.22@um.edu.mt
[2] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3858-5502 | claudine.borg@um.edu.mt

[*] Department of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting, University of Malta, Malta

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1. Introduction

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in professional life has been increasing steadily, with AI chatbots boosting productivity by about 14% (Brynjolfsson et al., 2023). Generative AI models like ChatGPT can be employed for various tasks, including machine translation (MT). ChatGPT, launched in November 2022, quickly gained over one million users within a week, significantly impacting AI chatbot adoption (OpenAI, 2022; Haque et al., 2022). The rise of generative AI is also acknowledged in the discipline of Translation Studies (TS), as evidenced by conferences on this interdisciplinary topic, such as the Artificial Intelligence in Translation Summit 2023[1]. On the practical side, the translation industry also started to employ AI models. For instance, translation agencies introduced chatbots to communicate with language service providers (LSP) and assigned them tasks. In addition, software, such as CoTranslatorAI[2], allows professionals to enhance their workflows by using generative AI models for various tasks, from writing emails to editing or translating text. One important aspect of working with generative AI models is prompting, i.e., instructing and guiding the desired output (Zhang et al., 2023). In parallel, the continuous advancements in MT empower LSPs to produce more translations in a given time. Neural machine translation (NMT) systems are the current state-of-the-art (Kenny, 2022), but their outputs are not error-free (Rossi & Carré, 2022). Evaluation of the output of MT systems is essential for their enhancement as well as to understand their strengths and limitations, and recognize the need for post-editing, i.e., the process of identifying and revising errors in MT output (O'Brien, 2022).

The primary objectives of this study are to analytically assess translation quality by ChatGPT on a creative translation task in the English-German language pair, as well as to examine the effects of using different prompts. The study analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of ChatGPT's translations through manual error annotation. By doing so, the research intends to shed light on its efficacy, shortcomings, and potential areas for improvement.

When ChatGPT was first released, the majority of studies were holistically evaluating ChatGPT's translation performance, and only a few analytic studies for other language pairs existed. Therefore, there is a gap when it comes to analytically assessing English-German translations.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses relevant existing literature and concepts, while Section 3 describes the research design, as well as the methods used for data collection and analysis. Section 4 presents the results of the error annotation of the raw MT outputs. The subsequent Section 5 reviews the main results in light of the literature reviewed. Lastly, the Conclusion summarizes the results and suggests future research directions.

[1]. https://cotranslatorai.com/ [Accessed: 13.05.2024]
[2]. https://aiintranslation.com/2023-replays [Accessed: 13.05.2024]

2. Theoretical contextualization

2.1. Machine translation with ChatGPT

ChatGPT was launched in late 2022 and within approximately one-year, numerous papers exploring its application for machine translation were published (e.g., Jiao et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2023; Farrell, 2023).

Jiang and Zhang (2024) used ChatGPT to translate sentences from Chinese into English. Their results (2024) showed that most errors are related to style. In particular, the researchers observed that ChatGPT's translations contain more awkward and unidiomatic expressions than NMT systems. However, they were able to reduce style errors and other error types by providing context or examples in the prompts. In contrast, Wang et al. (2023) claimed that sentence-level translations may lack coherence and context. Translating sentences in isolation does not take advantage of ChatGPT's ability to learn and adapt from context (Brown et al., 2020). However, translating on document-level[1] can improve discourse awareness and translation quality (Wang et al., 2023). Findings from Karpinska and Iyyer (2023, p. 9) demonstrated that sentence "translations contain 29.5% more mistranslations, 65.4% more grammatical errors, over 12 times more inconsistency errors, and three times more register errors". Nevertheless, they still identified many critical mistranslations and other errors in the paragraph translations.

Some studies focused on the translation of rhetorical devices, such as Yamada (2023), who demonstrated that GPT-4 provided literal translations of idioms for Japanese-English, using a simple prompt, while prompts with more information generated a more appropriate translation two out of three times. Similarly, Karabayeva and Kalizhanova (2024) observed that ChatGPT prioritises literal meaning over artistic expression when translating passages. Their findings (2024) showed acceptable accuracy for descriptive sentences, but figures of speech suffered in accuracy. According to Sahari et al. (2024), GPT-3 aims to preserve both meaning and structure, which negatively affects the quality of passage translations. Nonetheless, when Yamada (2023) gave specific instructions focusing on literary devices, ChatGPT demonstrated enhanced performance in certain creative aspects.

Importantly, researchers should select texts published after September 2021 to avoid contamination from large language models (LLM) pretraining data when using ChatGPT for TS (Karpinska & Iyyer, 2023). Moreover, it has been found that GPT models performed well for high-resource European languages, but their abilities were limited for low-resource languages (Hendy et al., 2023). The translation quality varied not only between language pairs but also between the different GPTs. Recent studies predominantly used GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 (e.g., Lyu et al., 2023; Kadaoui et al., 2023) and it was found that ChatGPT is the best translator among existing LLMs (Zhu et al., 2023; Kadaoui et al., 2023).

[1]. In MT research, the term "document-level" has been employed to refer to both multi-sentence passages and entire documents (Karpinska & Iyyer, 2023). In the literature, the distinction between document, passage, and paragraph translation is not always clear, but efforts are made in this work to clarify it as comprehensively as possible.

One of the strengths of ChatGPT lies in its capability to adapt a text to a certain audience (Lyu et al., 2023). It also performs robustly on erroneous, short, or colloquial source sentences and produces reasonable translations for partial or incomplete sentences (Hendy et al., 2023). However, it has limitations. Hendy et al. (2023) found that the engine generated unnatural translations for uncommon or complex sentences. Additionally, accuracy mistakes such as misinformation and hallucinations may occasionally appear (Hendy et al., 2023). In addition, Wang et al. (2023) showed that translation outputs occasionally contained omissions and showed copying behaviors. One reason for these limitations could be that ChatGPT is mainly trained on English data (Hendy et al., 2023).

2.2. Prompt writing

The ability to prompt generative AI systems is the main difference from generic NMT systems (Lommel, 2023). Consequently, designing effective prompts has emerged as a key aspect of MT, as they impact style, accuracy, and precision (Jiao et al., 2024). Prompt writing involves creating and refining instructions for an AI model to produce precise and relevant responses (Bammel, 2023). It is crucial to emphasize that no single method is universally effective for all scenarios and all LLMs. The key to finding the most effective prompt for a specific task is to continuously test and evaluate different prompts (Abdullahi et al., 2024). Consequently, current research is actively investigating the impact of prompts and strategies on machine translation tasks, e.g., Jiang and Zhang (2024) and Jiao et al. (2024), and the present study contributes towards this effort.

2.2.1. General strategies for prompting

Firstly, prompts must be correct, natural, and complete (Bammel, 2023). Users can also include examples of the desired output, known as shots, in prompts to demonstrate the expected output.

Prompting strategies can be differentiated into zero-shot, one-shot and few-shot prompts (Dang et al., 2022). As the name indicates, no examples are provided in zero-shot prompts, and LLMs execute a task purely based on the data it is trained on (Brown et al., 2020). One-shot prompts contain one example which serves as a reference to the LLM on the structure or context. Few-shot prompts incorporate multiple examples which can vary between three, five or more examples (Brown et al., 2020). They are called accordingly three-shot prompts, five-shot prompts, etc.

Few-shot prompting enables in-context learning, which recent studies have shown to be beneficial (Peng et al., 2023), but improvements may be limited by the prompt (Gao et al., 2023). Therefore, few-shot prompting has its limitations (Brown et al., 2020). LLMs can occasionally forget context or interpret it incorrectly, and their capacity to learn complex concepts or tasks may be restricted (Brown et al., 2020). Thus, models can still produce inconsistent or unpredictable results (Brown et al., 2020).

Providing context can further improve precision, which can include background information, domain-specific knowledge, audience, purpose (Siu, 2023), or other relevant information. Any context

information might already be included in the examples. Although it has been found that more context in prompts produces better outputs (Khandelwal et al., 2018; Beltagy et al., 2020), Wu et al. (2022) stated that instructions and long context bodies could conflict with each other, leading to no improvement.

Moreover, there are two primary forms of presenting prompts: the single-turn prompt and the multiple-turn prompt (Jiao et al., 2024). Single-turn prompts entail providing the model with a single input and output. In contrast, multiple-turn prompts involve conversational interactions, typically comprising several rounds of dialogue (Jiao et al., 2024).

2.2.2. Prompt writing for machine translation

Many recent studies on prompt writing for translation explored how prompting can improve the output without training or fine-tuning large parallel corpora. These works varied in their experiments. Indeed, while some researchers used simple prompts without further context information (e.g., Jiao et al., 2023), some chose to provide information in the prompt (e.g., Yamada, 2023). Besides, some studies exclusively focused on zero-shot prompts (e.g., Jiao et al., 2023) or few-shot prompts (e.g., Karpinska & Iyyer, 2023), while others compared zero-shot and few-shot prompts (e.g., Jiang & Zhang, 2024).

According to Wang et al. (2023), even a simple prompt can effectively capture document-level context. Hendy et al. (2023) observed that a few-shot setup enhanced the performance over zero-shots on sentence-level translation when translating from English into another language. Similar findings for sentence-level were reported by Kadaoui et al. (2023) and Peng et al. (2023). Similarly, Jiang and Zhang (2024) compared the results of sentence translations using three prompts, namely a zero-shot prompt, a one-shot prompt, and a prompt with context. Based on human evaluation, the researchers observed the lowest penalties for the one-shot and context prompt when compared to zero-shot (Jiang & Zhang, 2024). Likewise, Jiao et al. (2024) demonstrated that increasing the context in the prompt and using few-shots led to improved translation quality. For sentence translation, few-shots produced some steady improvements; however, this was not the case for the translation of passages (Hendy et al., 2023). Hendy et al. (2023) explained that document translation possibly provides sufficient context rendering few-shots redundant.

Some studies included further context information in their prompts. Gao et al. (2023) found that ChatGPT performed better at sentence-level when the prompt contained the domain information, which is in line with the findings of Peng et al. (2023), whereas incorrect domain information hurt the translation quality. Results from Peng et al. (2023) regarding the task-specific prompt showed no improvement in two out of three automatic evaluation metrics for English-German. According to Yamada (2023), incorporating the purpose and target audience generally improved the quality of marketing phrases and culturally dependent idiomatic translations obtained from GPT-4. Additionally, introducing the concept of dynamic equivalence also enhanced creative translation quality (Yamada, 2023). Yet, ChatGPT performed similarly with several semantically similar prompts (Lyu et al., 2023).

Regarding shot selection, Zhang et al. (2023) showed that the correlation between performance and shot selection is consistent, although weak. Moreover, Kadaoui et al. (2023) demonstrated that ChatGPT prefers an English prompt for MT. Also, sentence-level examples are effective for paragraph translation (Zhang et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). The findings from previous studies are thus inconclusive, which highlights the need for further studies evaluating the impact of prompts in translated outputs generated by ChatGPT.

2.3. Translation quality assessment

The quality of a translation depends a lot on the context in which it is done (Rossi & Carré, 2022). A quality translation can be defined as one where the intended communicative function of the translation in the target culture and communicative situation for its specific audience is achieved (Nord, 1997). Analytic human evaluation can offer detailed insights into the nature of errors. In addition, the translation brief plays a crucial role in this context because it explicitly states the communicative situation and the purpose of the translated text, directly influencing the criteria used in translation quality assessment (TQA). The translation brief provides all necessary instructions and specifications for creating a high-quality translation, guiding both the translator and evaluators in their assessments (Nord, 2010; Lommel, 2018).

An essential aspect of TQA is the categorization of errors. The simplest approach to analyze the translation output is to identify each error and assign it an error tag. For this process, it is crucial to define error categories in advance, encompassing linguistic and translation aspects (Popović, 2018). Additionally, evaluators should take the severity of errors into consideration (Lommel, 2018). Although it is a very challenging and time-consuming task, manual error classification has the possibility of providing more details on the quality of MT outputs than automatic metrics (Popović, 2018).

In 2011, the Translation Automation User Society (TAUS) created the Dynamic Quality Framework (DQF) (Görög, 2014), and in 2012, the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) developed the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM). Both frameworks emphasize that translation evaluation is flexible and aligns with the content type, purpose, and context of the translation (Görög, 2014; Lommel, 2018). By 2015, TAUS and DFKI developed the harmonized DQF-MQM error typology (Lommel, 2018). The aim was to bridge the gap between the specifications and definitions (Görög, 2014). This harmonized typology categorizes errors into four severity levels and includes 50 error types (Lommel, 2018). DQF-MQM is now a frequently used industry standard for the evaluation of translations (Lommel, 2018), for example, see Diab (2021) and Bayón and Sánchez Gijón (2023).

2.3.1. TQA for LLMs

The existing research studies differ in their approaches to evaluating translations produced by LLMs. While some studies relied on human evaluation (e.g., Khoshafah, 2023), others employed automatic metrics (e.g., Jiao et al., 2023). The majority, however, used both human and automatic evaluation (e.g., Jiang & Zhang, 2024).

Research focused on human evaluation includes the work of Sanz-Valdivieso and López-Arroyo (2023), where annotators analyzed translations using the MQM framework. Their study highlighted the precision and detail that can be achieved when using a structured framework like MQM to analyze translations. Other studies that also utilized the MQM metric for human evaluation include Lu et al. (2023) and Karpinska and Iyyer (2023). As stated, some researchers employed automatic metrics as well as human assessments in their studies. Jiang and Zhang (2024) examined translations based on four automatic metrics and human evaluation, which is based on the DQF-MQM error typology and a seven-point Likert Scale, finding that human evaluators tended to give slightly higher scores to outputs from prompts with a shot or context.

Overall, various studies employed different methods to evaluate translations obtained by LLMs. It is worth noting that several studies incorporated the MQM metrics for error annotation. Human error analysis offers the advantage of critically engaging with a text on the micro and macro text level, providing a detailed overview of common and critical errors. For this reason, this study employs a human error analysis, which is described in Section 3.

This section discussed key notions and previous research relevant to this study. The advances in technology, especially the emergence of AI and LLMs, highlight the need to explore MT in connection with these technologies. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by delving into the evaluation of MT output by ChatGPT, taking a creative text machine translated from English into German as a case study. It has two main aims: 1) to analyze and classify errors in translations obtained from ChatGPT and 2) to examine the impact of different types of prompts on the quality of the translated outputs. Hence, the first research question is “How is the quality of texts translated by ChatGPT?”, and the second research question is “How does prompt writing impact translation?”. The next section presents the methodology applied for collecting and analyzing data.

3. Method

The methodology draws on two rounds of literature review, as generative AI is a relatively new and driving field (Brühl, 2024). The literature review considers research until the end of February 2024, which informed the methodology of the current study. Additionally, ChatGPT (GPT-3.5) was selected as translation tool due to its ever-increasing popularity and improvements (Sanz-Valdivieso & López-Arroyo, 2023; OpenAI, 2023).

3.1. Data collection

3.1.1. Source text

This study centres on a creative text written in American English and three German target texts (TTs) obtained from ChatGPT following three different prompts. The source text (ST) is represented by the blog article *Where to watch the most beautiful sunsets in the world* by Sagi-Ofir (2022) which appeared

in A Luxury Travel Blog[1]. It encompasses 895 words and 55 sentences. The ST was selected because it includes figurative language, providing a robust test for the evaluation of quality of creative text translation. Moreover, the text had to be published after September 2021 to avoid data contamination with the AI model's training data since GPT-3.5 was updated till that date (Karpinska & Iyyer, 2023). For the use in the study, the ST was saved in an individual Word document; permission was obtained from the editor of the website.

After selecting the ST, a translation brief was formulated, which will serve as guide when evaluating if the AI outputs meet the requirements described in the brief. The brief was created following Nord (2010, 1997) and outlines the communicative situation of the TT. Importantly, the translation must achieve the same function as the ST, which is primarily operational, with expressive and informative functions also present (Reiss, 1981). Additionally, the content of the ST must be reproduced accurately, using appropriate terminology and adhering to target language conventions.

Table 1. Criteria of sample selection

Sender	(ST/TT) A Luxury Travel Blog
Target audience	(ST/TT) Affluent individuals with high disposable incomes who seek exceptional experiences in their travels
Medium	(ST/TT) HTML document on the internet
Text variety	(ST/TT) Travel blog article
Intention, purpose	(ST/TT) Gaining traffic to the website through advertising luxury travel destinations
Place	(ST) Worldwide (TT) Germany
Time	(ST) 2022 (TT) 2024

3.1.2. Prompts

Three prompts were carefully designed to examine which one produces the best translation quality and to identify the differences in the outputs. Using three prompts, three translations were generated, analyzed and compared. Each translation task was entered only once into ChatGPT in the form of a single-turn prompt. The translations with ChatGPT were generated on 18.12.2023. Importantly, each translation was created in a new chat, ensuring that ChatGPT did not have access to information from previous translations. The translations were then saved as Word documents.

All prompts were written in English as previous research found that LLMs prefer English prompts (Kadaoui et al., 2023). For Prompt 1, a simple zero-shot prompt was selected which only instructs the engine to translate, as this approach has been popular in previous studies (e.g., Wang et al., 2023). Prompt 2 is more comprehensive as it includes the domain, the text type, the purpose, and the target audience. This approach involved providing the translation brief to the AI model. The design of Prompt 2 was

[1]. https://www.aluxurytravelblog.com/2022/10/16/most-beautiful-sunsets-in-the-world/ [Last accessed 17.08.2024].

adapted from CoTranslatorAI and Yamada (2023). It was created to enhance translation quality through context, as emphasized by Gao et al. (2023) and Lyu et al. (2023).

Table 2. Prompt design

Method	Prompt
Prompt 1	Translate this document from English to German:
Prompt 2	You are an expert English to German translator of travel articles. Please fulfil the following conditions when translating. Purpose of the translation: Gaining traffic to the website through advertising luxury travel destinations Target audience: Affluent individuals with high disposable incomes who seek exceptional experiences during their travels Translate the following text from English to German:
Prompt 3	You are an expert English to German translator of travel articles. Please fulfil the following conditions when translating. Purpose of the translation: Gaining traffic to the website through advertising luxury travel destinations Target audience: Affluent individuals with high disposable incomes who seek exceptional experiences during their travels Here are some previous translated segments to refer to: English: {source} German: {reference} English: {source} German: {reference} English: {source} German: {reference} English: {source} German: {reference} English: {source} German: {reference} Translate the following text from English to German:

Prompt 3 includes all information from Prompt 2 and an additional five-shots. This strategy was chosen as previous research has demonstrated that few-shots produce some steady improvements for sentence translation (e.g., Jiao et al., 2024). It has also been employed as a strategy in paragraph translation (Karpinska & Iyyer, 2023). The design of the shots in Prompt 3 was adapted from CoTranslatorAI.

Moreover, sentence examples were selected as they proved to be more effective than word or paragraph examples (Zhu et al., 2023). The examples' length follows Zhang et al. (2023) and are between 10 and 100 tokens. The sentences were also selected based on correctness, relevance, and diversity (Hendy et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). The example sentences were taken from websites discussing similar topics as the translation tasks. Some examples were from multilingual websites and others were translated by the first author as it was challenging to find many relevant examples in both languages. Additionally, the examples were edited to fit the purpose of the translation at hand, to resemble the desired output, and to ensure coherence and similarity in structure and style, as they were taken from several websites.

It is worth noting that after the prompts were designed and the machine translations were produced in December 2023, a new study by Jiang and Zhang (2024) was published in January 2024 which demonstrated similar prompting strategies, including a simple zero-shot prompt, a context prompt, and a prompt with one example. This highlights the thought-through and robust design of the study present.

3.2. Data analysis

Once the machine translations were generated, the errors of all three outputs were manually annotated in Word and entered into a scorecard. The evaluation was conducted one text at a time, beginning with the translation of the creative translation using Prompt 1 (CTP1), followed by those using Prompts 2 and 3 (CTP2, CTP3). To ensure consistent error tags, the translations were compared to each other. Before the start of the annotation process, the error typology and severity levels, including definitions and examples, were established as a measure to provide objective guidelines as emphasized by Rossi and Carré (2022). In the evaluation, a human translation was not used as a benchmark.

3.2.1. Scorecard

The three translations have identical scorecards which were adapted from an existing Excel spreadsheet downloadable from the MQM website (MQM, 2024a). Each error was recorded according to its severity. The penalty points 0 = Neutral, 1 = Minor, 10 = Major, and 100 = Critical, following Lommel (2018), were selected as they provide sufficient distinction between the severities. The scorecards contain the Maximum Score Value of 100, the Scaling Parameter of 1, and the word count of the translation, which are used to calculate the results (MQM, 2024b). The Scaling Parameter 1 facilitates the calculation of scores and conclusions as it provides a clear starting point. After recording the errors, the spreadsheets counted the number of errors for each category and calculated the Error Type Penalty Total, Absolute Penalty Total, Per-Word Penalty Total, and Overall Quality Score (MQM, 2024b), which were used to analyze and compare the translations. As far as repeated errors are concerned, each error decreases the overall quality, since the evaluation aims to assess the quality of the translation products. Therefore, regardless of repetition, any error is considered as such (MQM, 2024c).

3.2.2. Error typology

For the evaluation, an error typology was created and defined, based on and adapted from the harmonized DQF-MQM typology (Lommel, 2018; DFKI & QTLaunchPad, 2015). This framework was chosen as it is a shared industry standard (Krüger, 2021) and a flexible system to assess translation quality analytically, i.e. it allows the identification and categorization of specific errors in a particular translation (Lommel, 2018). A subset of the errors in the DQF MQM metrics was selected based on findings in previous studies (e.g., Jiang & Zhang, 2024, Sanz-Valdivieso & López-Arroyo, 2023). The categories shall highlight the strengths and limitations of the AI model for the text type as well as for the language pair, as highlighted by Popović (2018). Additionally, it covers linguistic and translation aspects relevant to the translations, resulting in a comprehensive error typology encompassing seven categories (level 1) and twenty subcategories (level 2) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Evaluation typology

Level 1	**Level 2**
Accuracy	Mistranslation
	Addition
	Omission
	Untranslated text
Fluency	Morphology
	Syntax
	Spelling
	Punctuation
	Ambiguity
	Coherence
	Cohesion
Terminology	Inconsistent use of terminology
	Wrong term
Style	Language register
	Awkward style
	Unidiomatic style
	Inconsistent style
Locale conventions	Number format
Audience appropriateness	Culture-specific reference
	End-user suitability
Other	

Section 3 described the methodology employed to collect data and to analyze it. Section 4 presents the study's results and analyzes them.

4. Analysis and results

Section 4.1 focuses on the overall results, error penalty scores, distribution of error severity, and errors at level 1 of the error typology in the different outputs. Section 4.2 describes the error types recorded at level 2, examining specific errors and providing examples. Text elements categorized under the 'neutral level' are not discussed given their limited impact on the overall results.

4.1. Results and scores at level 1

The word count of the three translations ranges from 840 words in CTP1 to 846 words in CTP3 as shown in Table 4. The ST contains approximately 50 words more than the translations.

Table 4. Word count of the three translations

Creative ST	**CTP1**	**CTP2**	**CTP3**
895 words	840 words	844 words	846 words

Table 5 shows the total number of errors and the proportion of minor and major errors for the three translations. Firstly, a decrease in the total number of errors is revealed as the prompt gets more elaborate. Whereas the translation with Prompt 1 (CTP1) contains 76 errors, in the creative translation with Prompt 2 (CTP2) this is reduced to 73 errors, and in the translation with Prompt 3 (CTP3) the number of errors is further reduced to 63. Interestingly, however, the translations generated with the more comprehensive prompts include a much higher number of major errors: CTP1 contains only 4 (5%), CTP2 contains 16 (22%) and CTP3 14 (22%) major errors. The most major errors belong to accuracy, followed by terminology (see Table 6). The remaining major errors belong to fluency and style. In addition, the translations do not include any critical errors.

Table 5. Error contribution in the translations

Level 1	**CTP1**	**CTP2**	**CTP3**
Total number of errors	76 (100%)	73 (100%)	63 (100%)
Total number & percentage of minor errors	72 (95%)	57 (78%)	49 (78%)
Total number & percentage of major errors	4 (5%)	16 (22%)	14 (22%)

Table 6. Major errors at level 1 of the error typology

Level 1	**CTP1**	**CTP2**	**CTP3**
Accuracy	2 (50%)	6 (37%)	7 (50%)
Fluency	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	1 (7%)
Terminology	1 (25%)	4 (25%)	5 (36%)
Style	1 (25%)	3 (19%)	1 (7%)
Total number of major errors	4 (100%)	16 (100%)	14 (100%)

In Table 7, the scores and values from the scorecards are presented. As for the Absolute Penalty Totals, CTP1 obtains the best score with 112, whereas CTP2 and CTP3 yield significantly higher scores of 217 and 188, respectively. These scores are also mirrored by the Per-Word Penalty Total. Consequently, CTP1 obtains the best Overall Quality Score with 86.67, followed by CTP3 with 77.78 and CTP2 with 74.29. These scores can be explained by the fact that, although CTP2 and CTP3 have fewer errors overall, they contain more severe errors. Notably, the results show that in this particular study, a simple prompt achieved the highest quality for the translation of the text involved in this case study.

Table 7. Scores and values from the scorecards[1]

Result Category	CTP1	CTP2	CTP3
Absolute Penalty Total	112.00	217.00	188.00
Per-Word Penalty Total	0.13	0.26	0.22
Overall Quality Score	86.67	74.29	77.78

Table 8 presents the errors categorized according to the error typology at level 1. The most frequent mistakes belong to the category style – they encompass 45 (59%) in CTP1, 36 (49%) in CTP2, and 30 (48%) in CTP3. This implies that around half of the errors are linked to style. Importantly, the stylistic errors are reduced with the longer prompts. The second most prominent error type relates to fluency with 17 (22%) for CTP1, 16 (22%) for CTP2, and 11 (17%) for CTP3. Similar to style errors, a decrease in mistakes is observed. In contrast, the results for the accuracy category show an increase in errors. The simple Prompt 1 produced a translation with 6 accuracy mistakes (8%), whereas CTP2 and CTP3 contain 11 such mistakes (15% and 17%, respectively). Likewise, there is a slight increase in the categories of terminology and audience appropriateness: terminology errors rise from 5 (7%) to 7 in both CTP2 and CTP3 (10% and 11%, respectively), while audience appropriateness errors increase from 3 (4%) to 4 (6%), with additional errors found only in CTP3.

Table 8. Total error count and percentage at level 1 of the error typology

Level 1	CTP1	CTP2	CTP3
Accuracy	6 (8%)	11 (15%)	11 (17%)
Fluency	17 (22%)	16 (22%)	11 (17%)
Terminology	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	7 (11%)
Style	45 (59%)	36 (49%)	30 (48%)
Audience appropriateness	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	4 (6%)
Total number of errors	76 (100%)	73 (100%)	63 (100%)

[1]. The table presented shows raw scorecard values rather than percentages. This is due to the nature of the data, which is based on a specific scoring system that does not easily translate to percentage values.

4.2. Textual analysis at level 2

This section zooms in on level 2 of the error typology, providing more insights into the nature of the errors. The detailed analysis is supported by specific examples from the creative text translations.

Table 9 presents all errors recorded under level 2, providing a comprehensive overview of the categories and the errors made. Notably, no errors are recorded under addition, untranslated text, ambiguity, coherence, inconsistent use of terminology, number format, and cultural-specific reference.

Table 9. Total error count at level 2 of the error typology

Level 1	Level 2	CTP1	CTP2	CTP3
Accuracy	Mistranslation	6 (8%)	10 (14%)	11 (17%)
	Addition	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Omission	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
	Untranslated text	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Total	6 (8%)	11 (15%)	11 (17%)
Fluency	Morphology	3 (4%)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)
	Syntax	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
	Spelling	5 (7%)	3 (4%)	3 (5%)
	Punctuation	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
	Ambiguity	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Coherence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Cohesion	8 (11%)	8 (11%)	7 (11%)
	Total	17 (22%)	16 (22%)	11 (17%)
Terminology	Inconsistent use of terminology	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Wrong term	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	7 (11%)
	Total	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	7 (11%)
Style	Language register	21 (28%)	7 (10%)	7 (11%)
	Awkward style	3 (4%)	4 (5%)	2 (3%)
	Unidiomatic style	20 (26%)	24 (33%)	20 (32%)
	Inconsistent style	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
	Total	45 (59%)	36 (49%)	30 (48%)
Local conventions	Number format	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Audience appropriateness	Culture-specific reference	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	End-user suitability	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	4 (6%)
	Total	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	4 (6%)
Other		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total number of errors		76 (100%)	73 (100%)	63 (100%)

The next sections delve deeper in each error type.

4.2.1. Accuracy

To ensure a clear TT, it is crucial to preserve the meaning of the ST and hence its accuracy. As Table 9 shows, accuracy ranks as the third highest error with 6 errors (8%) in CTP1, 10 errors (14%) in CTP2, and 11 errors (17%) in CTP3. One examples of a mistranslation is provided in Table 10, where "Italy" was wrongly replaced with "Venedig". Possibly, ChatGPT misinterpreted the context, leading to this mistranslation. However, it is correctly translated in the other two outputs.

Table 10. An example of mistranslation error

ST	you'll get to experience **Italy's** most beautiful city
CTP3	erleben Sie **Venedigs** schönste Stadt [experience **Venice's** most beautiful city] [1]

Additionally, the analysis shows that ChatGPT is able to translate simple devices with common German equivalents correctly. However, figures of speech without direct counterparts are translated literally, failing to convey the artistic style or meaning and sounding unnatural. This is exemplified by the examples in Tables 11 and 12, showing a well-translated idiom and a poorly translated one respectively.

Table 11. An example of a well-translated idiom

ST	this list just scratches the surface
CTP3	kratzt diese Liste nur an der Oberfläche [this list only scratches the surface]

Table 12. An example of a poorly translated idiom

ST	to tickle your fancy
CTP1	die deine Fantasie kitzeln [that tickle your fantasy]

The results suggest that ChatGPT has some limitations to the extent that it occasionally inaccurately transfers the meaning of the ST. Hence, this affects negatively the understanding of the texts as well as the imagination and emotions of the audience, ultimately lowering the translation quality.

4.2.2. Fluency

A text that flows smoothly makes it easier for the reader to understand and engage with the content. Therefore, fluency errors impact quality and require more cognitive effort for the readership. As exhibited in Table 9, the majority of errors fall under cohesion, with 8 errors (11%) in both CTP1 and CTP2, and 7 errors (11%) in CTP3. In addition, several spelling mistakes are found: 5 (7%) for CTP1 and 3 each for CTP2 and CTP3 (4% and 5%, respectively). Morphology-related errors are present as well. Punctuation

[1]. The English back translations were translated by the first author.

errors were only found in CTP1 and CTP2. Additionally, CTP2 is the only translation containing syntax errors.

The ST compromises one spelling mistake, "Quairaing" instead of "Quiraing", which is also found in CTP1 (see Table 13). In contrast, the AI corrected this mistake in CTP2 and CTP3. In addition, the term "landslip" is accurately rendered as "Erdrutsch" only in CTP1. The English noun phrase "Quairaing landslip" is translated as a compound noun with a hyphen in all three translations. While the spelling with the hyphen aligns with the rules of the Duden (2024a), it is untypical in real-world usage. The use of the hyphen could lead to misinterpretation, implying a landside named "Quiraing-Erdrutsch". The preferred construction, "der Erdrutsch Quiraing", clearly identifies "Quiraing" as the proper noun and "Erdrutsch" as its descriptive phrase. Separating them with a space helps maintain clarity and distinction between the two elements. This is common practice in German, as seen in phrases like "die Stadt Frankfurt" [the city Frankfurt] or "der Fluss Rhein" [the river Rhine].

Table 13. An example of spelling error

ST	The Quairaing landslip
CTP1	Der Quairaing-Erdrutsch [The Quairaing landslip]
CTP2	Der Quiraing-Einsturz [The Quiraing collapse]
CTP3	Die Quiraing-Rutschung [The Quiraing landslide]

These cohesion mistakes indicate that ChatGPT follows the source strictly instead of providing more idiomatic solutions in the target language. Additionally, the sentence in Table 14 shows that the beginning of the sentence with "So, if" was directly transferred into German. Yet, it appears atypical, thereby affecting the text's fluidity.

Table 14. An example of cohesion error

ST	**So, if you** opt for a typical Venetian gondola trip on the Grand Canal
CTP1	**Also, ob du** eine typische venezianische Gondelfahrt auf dem Canal Grande […]

By prioritizing source language conventions over the conventions of the target language, ChatGPT compromises the fluidity of the text. This applies to the majority of mistakes recorded in the subcategories of fluidity.

4.2.3. Terminology

Wrong terms were observed 5 times (7%) in CTP1, and 7 times in CTP2 and CTP3 (10% and 11%, respectively). Using incorrect terminology affects the meaning and clarity of the text. For example, "the Great Pyramids" is in all instances incorrectly translated to "die Großen Pyramiden" [the Big Pyramids]. While it can be understood, the correct proper noun in German is "die Pyramiden von Gizeh" [the Pyramids of Giza]. Similarly, ChatGPT faced difficulties with the correct translation of "crags". In CTP1 and CTP3, this term is translated to "Klippen" [cliffs], instead of "Felsen" [crags]. The dictionary

translation of “crags” involves both “Klippen” and “Felsen”. However, “Klippen” refers to cliffs at the coast or in the sea (Duden, 2024b), and within the context of the Quiraing landslip, the crags are inland. Thus, the correct term is “Felsen”, which is defined as a large mass of firmly cohesive rock (Duden, 2024c).

4.2.4. Style

The category with the most errors in this case study is style. Table 9 demonstrates that errors are recorded under every subcategory of style. In CTP2 and CTP3 most errors belong to unidiomatic style, with 24 (33%) and 20 (32%) errors respectively. In contrast, in CTP1, language register mistakes are most prominent, totaling 21 errors (28%), primarily due to the consistent use of informal pronouns instead of their formal counterparts. Moreover, 7 language register errors are present in CTP2 and CTP3 (10% and 11%, respectively), showcasing that besides pronouns, ChatGPT occasionally faces challenges in selecting appropriate verbs, for instance:

Table 15. An example of language register error

ST	Whether you’re **sipping** on a glass of yummy local wine on the harbor […]
CTP1	Ob du nun einen Schluck köstlichen lokalen Weins am Hafen **nimmst** […] [Whether you **take a sip** of delicious local wine at the harbour]
CTP2	Ob Sie auf dem Hafen ein Glas köstlichen lokalen Weins **schlürfen** […] [Whether you are **slurping** a glass of delicious local wine on the harbour]
CTP3	Ob Sie an einem Glas köstlichen lokalen Weins im Hafen nippen […] [Whether you are taking a nip of a glass of delicious local wine in the harbour]

Table 15 presents the three different translations of “sipping”. While in CTP1 the verb “nehmen” [take] is clear, it is considered a level too low in formality since it does not create an elegant and sophisticated atmosphere for luxury travelers. The verb “schlürfen” [slurp] in CTP2 has within the context a negative connotation, especially since it is perceived as inappropriately loud drinking of a beverage. This example is a clear demonstration that ChatGPT cannot be relied on completely and that the role of human translators is crucial to guarantee the quality of the translations. Yet, CTP3 shows an improvement and employs a verb [to take a nip] which fits well within the context.

The stylistic errors are especially striking in the translations due to their frequent appearance. This leads to the conclusion that the LLM has difficulties maintaining the artistic style of the ST and transferring it to the target culture.

4.2.5. Audience appropriateness

With regard to end-user suitability, CTP1 and CTP2 contain each 3 errors (4%), and CTP3 contains 4 errors (6%). The ST uses a lot of superlatives and emphasis, highlighting the greatest and best (e.g., “most beautiful”, “glorious”) sunsets, which is typical for American English (Durán-Muñoz, 2019). In contrast, overpromising and overemphasis should be avoided in German. Instead, positive forms can be used to

convey a sense of intensification or emphasis (Jílková, 2005). The example in Table 16 shows that the German translation in CTP3 feels over the top because "unglaubliche Naturwunder" [incredible natural wonder] is an overemphasis, considering that the word "Wunder" [wonder] already provides a positive emphasis. Therefore, this choice of words appears excessive because it amplifies the description beyond the intended tone, potentially diminishing the impact of the statement and also sounding inappropriate in German. The adjective "unglaubliche" [incredible] could be replaced with a less intense adjective, while still maintaining a certain emphasis. Hence, post-editors can exploit their cultural knowledge to improve the translation and make them more appropriate for the target audience.

Table 16. An example of end-user suitability error

ST	But nothing beats the **incredible natural wonder** of the sun setting over the beach and famous boardwalk.
CTP3	Aber nichts übertrifft das **unglaubliche Naturwunder**, wenn die Sonne über dem Strand und dem berühmten Holzsteg untergeht.

This section offered an in-depth analysis of the three annotated machine translations. Analysing the results of the translation task provided valuable insights into the types of errors produced by ChatGPT in creative translation. The subsequent section will discuss the implications of these results in accordance with results from previous studies.

5. Discussion

The analysis showed that the overall quality of the translations is rather good. This section explores the implications of these results considering those made by previous studies discussed in Section 2. The research questions are addressed directly at the end of Sections 5.1 and 5.2. Furthermore, the translations are reviewed considering the translation brief.

5.1. Translation quality of ChatGPT

Given the constant evolution of MT, analytical evaluations of MT outputs provide insights into the nature of errors, allowing for targeted improvements (Lommel, 2018). In reviewing the literature, no studies were found that analyzed the errors of ChatGPT's translations analytically concerning the English-German language pair. Thus, since there was no prior work in this language pair that could be used as a basis for this study, this case study drew on previous studies on the topic investigating different language pairs. This section focuses on errors concerning style, accuracy, robustness, and rhetorical devices.

Given the inherent variations between language conventions, the translation must align with the appropriate conventions of the target language (Nord, 2010). While meaning is not conveyed by words alone, a successful translation accurately captures the intended meaning using an appropriate language style (Nord, 2010). Thus, a literal translation is unsuitable for the text type involved in this study, yet it appears in all three outputs. Although some portions of the outputs are understandable, the literal rendition

occasionally leads to a loss in meaning and unnatural translation. As a result, style represents the category with the most errors recorded. This aligns with the results of Jiang and Zhang (2024), who translated sentences of diplomatic texts from Chinese into English using ChatGPT and found that most errors concern awkward and unidiomatic style. Similarly, Hendy et al. (2023) observed unnatural translations of uncommon or complex sentences. The subsequent error type noted by Jiang and Zhang (2024) concerns accuracy. Likewise, Karpinska and Iyyer (2023) found that paragraph translations into Polish, Japanese, and English contain numerous mistranslations and grammatical errors and occasionally omit content. According to Hendy et al. (2023) mistranslations appear especially when translating from English. These observations reflect the results of the present investigation, in which mistranslation is the leading subcategory of accuracy. The results outline that the categories unidiomatic style, language register, cohesion and mistranslations are the shortcomings of ChatGPT. The number of grammatical errors, such as those related to morphology and syntax, is limited, representing a relatively minor limitation.

Notably, CTP2 and CTP3 contain fewer style and fluency errors but more accuracy errors compared to the translations with Prompts 1. During the annotation process, an improved style in some sentences in the translation with Prompt 3 was noted, giving the impression of improved output; however, this was a subjective observation. The results of Section 4 clearly show that CTP2 and CTP3 still lag behind CTP1. This observation suggests that the outputs of CTP2 and CTP3 could be more deceiving to a user unfamiliar with translation processes. This inference may explain why, in the study by Jiang and Zhang (2024), annotators assigned higher scores to translations obtained from a prompt with a one-shot or context. Indeed, the researchers (2024) noted that the style of the translations improved when an example or context was included in the prompt.

Another merit of ChatGPT is that it performs robustly on erroneous sentences, as found by Hendy et al. (2023). Similar observations are made in the present study, where the LLM translated the misspelled word “Quairaing” two out of three times correctly. This suggests that ChatGPT can correct misspelled words in the source in most instances.

The creative text involved in this study relies on the use of imaginative language. It includes many figures of speech and other stylistic devices. This highlights again that meaning is more than just the dictionary translation of words, but rather the nuanced expression of concepts within a specific linguistic and cultural context (Munday, 2016). As shown in the analysis, ChatGPT provides literal translations for some rhetorical devices which reflect the results of previous studies (Yamada, 2023; Karabayeva & Kalizhanova, 2024). In particular, simple, common metaphors are translated adequately, while other metaphors present challenges (Karabayeva & Kalizhanova, 2024). Like the findings by Karabayeva and Kalizhanova (2024) for English-Russian, ChatGPT neglects artistic expression, and whereas descriptive sentences are translated correctly, figurative language exhibits lower accuracy. Overall, their findings (2024) indicated that the LLM cannot replicate the nuances, fluidity, and aesthetics of rhetorical devices of the source. In addition, Sahari et al. (2024) highlighted that ChatGPT aims to preserve the sentence structure and maintain the meaning at the same time, which is not a suitable approach for creative translation, as emphasized by Yamada (2023). And this holds true for the creative translation of this study.

To answer the research question regarding the quality of texts translated by ChatGPT, it must be acknowledged that all outputs are coherent and understandable. The average Overall Quality Score is 79.58. Style and fluency are the error categories with the highest frequency encountered. These are the aspects which need the most attention and improvement and suggest that ChatGPT faced several challenges regarding the text's stylistic aspects. A common observation in all outputs is that ChatGPT aims to keep the sentence structure of the ST, with a consequent loss in meaning, style, and flow.

One explanation for the limitations could be that ChatGPT is primarily trained on English data (Hendy et al., 2023). Training the LLM on more multilingual data could potentially advance the translation performance, leading to more idiomatic translations which follow target language conventions over English conventions. Similarly, natural language processing could benefit from including training data that contains knowledge of rhetoric, culture, and cognition (Chakrabarty et al., 2021). However, there are rapid advancements taking place as LLM scale and techniques continue to enhance (Brown et al., 2020).

5.2. Impact of prompts on translation

Based on the results of the annotation process, this section identifies prevalent trends and evaluates prompt strategies with reference to the literature. It is important to note that the studies used for this comparison involve different text types, text lengths, prompts, and language pairs. Thus, drawing direct parallels between the results in this study and those of previous studies necessitates careful consideration of these differences.

The ability to prompt generative AI systems is the main difference from generic NMT systems (Lommel, 2023). Users can instruct, add relevant information, and ultimately guide ChatGPT's performance (Siu, 2023). The study by Wang et al. (2023) demonstrated that a simple zero-shot is capable of effectively capturing the context of document translations, which is in line with the results of the previous section. Simple Prompt 1 obtained the lowest penalty points and generated a coherent translation. This highlights the robustness of zero-shot methods for translation tasks on document-level.

As described in the Methodology, the prompt design of Jiang and Zhang (2024) shows parallels to the three prompts outlined for this study. Hence, it is reasonable to compare the results of these two studies. Importantly, the studies vary in their research design. In contrast to the present study, which focuses on English-German creative document translation, Jiang and Zhang (2024) focused on sentence translation of diplomatic texts in Chinese-English. The researchers (2024) found that the prompts with the example and context led to fewer errors under style. This mirrors the results reported in this study, where Prompts 2 and 3 also result in a lower number of style and fluency errors. This suggests that context and examples can guide ChatGPT's output to more closely resemble the desired style. In addition, the comparison of translations using zero-shot, one-shot, and context prompts revealed higher translation quality among the one-shot and context prompts (Jiang & Zhang, 2024). This contrasts with the results in the present study, where the simple zero-shot Prompt 1 yields the highest performance, while the other two more complex prompts are of lower quality. One explanation for these differences could be the use of different language

pairs and text genres in each study. Moreover, Jiang and Zhang (2024) stated that their different prompting approaches did not lead to a significant enhancement in ChatGPT's translation capabilities overall. Conversely, the present study did not identify any improvements in translation quality through the use of various prompting strategies. These different outcomes could be justified by the differences in the nature of the translation tasks in each study. Furthermore, as found by Hendy et al. (2023), ChatGPT achieved steady improvements for sentence-level translations, with the most gains from one high-quality shot. However, results for translation of passages indicated only slight quality enhancements, with overall results appearing relatively similar. Hendy et al. (2023) stated that the translation of passages provides sufficient context which makes few-shot prompts redundant. Likewise, Gao et al. (2023) found that well designed prompts improved translation quality, although this improvement was not consistently observed across all scenarios. Whereas more complex prompts yielded improvements for some language pairs, for others, it led to a performance drop. Gao et al. (2023) explained that the additional information in the prompt might have introduced noise. Likewise, Wu et al. (2022) stated that instructions and long context bodies could conflict with each other, leading to no improvement in the output. This could be a possible explanation for the declining results in the study at hand and may clarify why Prompt 1 yielded the best results. Importantly, the ST was entered right below the instructions in the same message, resulting in a lengthy input text in ChatGPT. Thus, it is possible that the prompts introduced noisy data, which led to the lower quality. This hypothesis certainly needs to be addressed in future research.

To address the second research question regarding the impact of prompts on translation, the results of the three prompts are briefly recapped. Prompt 1 achieves the highest translation quality. In this case, a zero-shot prompt provided the better translation output, albeit not an error free translation. The creative translation generated with Prompt 2 receives the lowest quality score out of all three translations. Nevertheless, Prompts 2 and 3 reduce style and fluency errors consistently. In addition, the translation quality declines with the context and few-shot prompts. The decrease in quality is from 86.67 to 74.29. These observations contradict the expectation from the literature review that performance would be enhanced with more complex prompts.

5.3. Translation evaluation according to the brief

The translation brief outlines the communicative situation in which the translation needs to fulfil its purpose (Nord, 2010). Accordingly, the text function and requirements for the translation were established in the brief devised for this study. After the analysis, the translations are compared with the translation brief to ensure all requirements are met and the translation objectives are achieved (Nord, 2010). This step contributes to fostering a comprehensive understanding of translation quality. This section will conclude based on the overall results of all three outputs. According to the translation brief, the creative text translations must fulfil the below four requirements:

1) Meeting the communicative situation and text function: partially fulfilled;

2) Accurate reproduction of all text contents: partially fulfilled;

3) Correctness of terminology: partially fulfilled;

4) Compliance with grammar, spelling, and appropriate use of language: partially fulfilled.

The ST has a strong persuasive character that evokes the reader's emotion. Nevertheless, due to the many errors categorized under fluency and style, it becomes clear that the translation task does not consistently maintain these qualities. While some parts are fluent and stimulate imagination, other parts fail in these regards. Hence, the text function and situation are only partially met. The translations represent the same informative content as in the source but are not consistently accurate. This text type evidently presents stylistic challenges for ChatGPT. As mentioned before, the translations are often too close to source language conventions. Thus, the creative translations are not of high quality, with only parts of the texts meeting the requirements. Several adaptations and changes would be vital to achieve an effective translation. The results continue to underline the need of having the MT and AI outputs post-edited by human translators in order to improve the quality of the raw outputs.

6. Conclusions

This study has provided insights into the nature of errors when using ChatGPT for translation tasks. It is one of the first studies to analytically evaluate machine translated output of ChatGPT for the English-German language pair. The main objectives of this study were to gain an understanding of the translation quality and the impact of prompts, indicating the strengths and limitations of ChatGPT. To reach these goals, the translation outputs were evaluated, and the results of the translations as well as the results of the different prompts were compared.

One of the most significant results of this case study is that the most common error produced by ChatGPT concerns style. In particular, language register errors and unidiomatic style errors prevail. Fluency errors rank second, with cohesion errors comprising the highest frequency, and accuracy ranks third with mistranslation errors. These results provide an overview of the main errors when translating a creative task with ChatGPT from English into German. In addition, the results highlight the importance of post-editing translations produced by ChatGPT to detect errors and improve the raw output to align with the task brief. Nevertheless, raw MT outputs are coherent and can be used to understand the meaning of the texts. The study indicates that although the overall quality of the translations is satisfactory, the intervention of trained translators is required to correct errors and fine-tune the machine translated text.

The study also evaluated the use of three different prompts. A key result is that more complex prompts (Prompt 2 and Prompt 3) consistently reduce style and fluency errors in the translations. This indicates that the information in the prompt provides guidance to ChatGPT regarding the stylistic and language aspect of the translation. However, the study shows that the better translation quality, though not error-free, is achieved with a simple prompt (Prompt 1). Indeed, the translation quality decreases when including context or examples in the prompt. It is crucial to emphasize that the output generated with the longer Prompts 2 and 3 could be particularly misleading to users unfamiliar with translation processes, highlighting the need for professional translators to review MT and AI-generated content. Nonetheless,

these results contradict the results of previous studies, such as Jiang and Zhang (2024), but can be justified by the utilization of different research design. It is possible that the long prompts in addition to the source texts may have introduced noise in this study. Further studies along similar lines are therefore needed.

The implications of these results extend beyond the limits of this study, impacting LSPs working in the German language, translator trainers, as well as scholars in the field of computational linguistics. The study provides an overview of the errors made by ChatGPT for creative translation tasks, particularly noting that most errors are stylistic. Understanding the strengths and limitations of AI-driven translation help to indicate what to focus on during translation pedagogy. Hence, this study provides insights to translator trainers on what to focus on when training budding translators to detect and correct errors performed by GPTs. Furthermore, LSPs can decide whether to include ChatGPT as a translation tool, as the study offers a comprehensive overview of translation quality, types of errors, and the influence of prompts on quality. By suggesting future research directions, LSPs are encouraged to experiment to generate better translation outputs and enhance their workflows when using ChatGPT. Moreover, the result that a simple prompt is sufficient for translating documents suggests that LSPs can avoid spending time on crafting detailed prompts, as doing so may decrease translation quality and ultimately lead to more post-editing efforts. Yet, the results also show that LSPs cannot do without human post-editors as AI translations cannot be relied on blindly.

The study has clarified and justified the methodology employed. However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of this study. The annotation process proved to be a time-consuming task and although the annotation was carried out mainly by the first author, it was thoroughly discussed with the second author. A full, double annotation carried out independently by the two authors might have reduced subjectivity, as different people might categorize some errors differently, but this would have been even more time-consuming. Therefore, we attempted to find a balanced solution. Additionally, the evaluation encompassed only human assessment, and utilizing both automatic and human metrics could provide a more comprehensive overview of the translation quality (Hendy et al., 2023).

Despite the interesting results, this study also raised further questions and hypotheses that need to be addressed in future studies. To begin with, the hypothesis that a lengthy input text – made of a complex prompt and a long text body – introduces noise and that the provided information is counterproductive, ultimately leading to a decrease in the translation quality, necessitates further research. One option could be to use the same three prompts but a translation with a lower word count than in the present study. Conducting a study with a shorter text could demonstrate whether the translations are of higher quality than in the current study and whether a long text body introduces noise. This would provide even further insights into how to translate and how to obtain a better translation quality using ChatGPT and could validate the results of the present study. Another research direction could be to explore different prompts and evaluate their impact. The present study was limited to the use of three prompts, but employing different prompts might yield different results (Zhang et al., 2023). For instance, as suggested by Yamada (2023), providing specific instructions focusing on literary devices could boost creative translation. Additionally, AI facilitates efficient collaboration between humans and machines, enabling

multi-turn conversation to produce high quality, refined translations. This approach was highlighted by Karabayeva and Kalizhanova (2024) and should also be considered in future research.

In summary, this study illustrated the complexities of MT with ChatGPT using a creative text. Through manual error annotation, it was able to identify valuable insights into ChatGPT's translation capabilities and the effectiveness of different prompts. It is clear that MT with ChatGPT remains a dynamic area for further exploration. By building upon the foundation laid in this study, future research can continue to advance our understanding of ChatGPT's capabilities on translation tasks and its implications for the translation industry and translator training, fostering multicultural exchange.

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About the authors

Melissa Puppel has a master's degree in Translation and Terminology Studies from the University of Malta. Her research interests include translation technologies, computer-aided translation and translation quality assessment.

Claudine Borg (PhD in Translation Studies) is a lecturer and head of the Department of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting Studies at the University of Malta. Her research interests lie primarily in cognitive translation studies, research methodology, translation revision and literary translation. She has published several scholarly works, among them *A Literary Translation in the Making. A process-oriented perspective* (2022, Routledge).

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Exploration of Intercultural Sensitivity Levels and Perceptions of International Students in Türkiye

Yiğit Salihoğlu[1]

Hitit University, Türkiye

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Abstract

Central to the disciplines of 21st-century skills and globalization, intercultural issues contribute to the comprehension of awareness regarding open perspectives, acceptance of cultural differences, and adaptation processes. Alongside the importance of a holistic point of view on cultural influences, intercultural sensitivity also reveals the stages of consciousness through the lens of individuals. Today, many students seek opportunities to go abroad for educational purposes. Previous studies in the Turkish context have been insufficient or inconsistent. Therefore, this study attempted to explore the intercultural sensitivity levels of international students using both quantitative and qualitative methods. From an empirical perspective, the findings illustrate the overall open-mindedness of international students, portraying harmony with Turkish society. Furthermore, through shared ideas and experiences, it was revealed that there are multiple areas of adaptation and socialization. Therefore, this study makes a major contribution to studies on intercultural sensitivity and contextual relationships by demonstrating the likely factors influencing cultural exchange opportunities.

Keywords

multiculturalism, student mobility, globalization, 21st-century skills, education

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4089-6193 | yigitsalihogluu@gmail.com

* School of Foreign Languages, Hitit University, Türkiye.

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1. Introduction

The definition of culture is a concept that predominantly includes the notion of a group or community with shared structures of values, meanings, beliefs, and traditions that are experienced and successively learned by each generation (Brumann, 1999). To provide a precise definition, Matsumoto and Juang (2016) identify culture as a concept that is acquired, collective, dynamic, and consisting of complex, responsive structures. Therefore, the global identity of culture has generally been considered central to our comprehension of communities. Through various experiences, individuals undergo acculturation processes that significantly contribute to their levels of cultural sensitivity.

From a holistic point of view, sensitivity to individual differences can be defined as the competence to have awareness of others, ranging from behavioral and perceptual to emotional differences (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1958). The perceived similarity of the differences allows individuals to respect the equal complexity and potential usefulness of each perspective. Similarly, Bakić-Mirić and Erkinovich (2013) highlighted that cultural sensitivity progresses with awareness that accepts differences between cultures, which are predominantly reflected in the ways different groups interact and connect with one another. As borders have become increasingly invisible and redefined through recent developments, developing sensitivity towards others has also been considered a fundamental component of raising individuals who are aware of global citizenship. Hmala (2023) identified the urgent need to create contexts that include intercultural occasions and opportunities to help individuals navigate culturally diverse settings. Accordingly, educational institutions demand considerable attention in fostering education about interculturality and globalization. On the other hand, Kramsch (2014) emphasizes the importance of the effectiveness of globalization processes, highlighting an apparent paradox between what is learned in theory and what students can actually apply in the real world. Therefore, national government policies, multicultural and transnational corporations, and other business associations require educational institutions to train students with intercultural competence or sensitivity to increase student mobility worldwide.

Today, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, students are more inclined to study abroad than ever before. International students are individuals who live in another country with the intention of participating in educational exchange programs (Kritz, 2015). Staying in an international environment is often regarded as a challenge, as international students in an unfamiliar culture experience culture shock, language barriers, adaptation and isolation problems, homesickness, and many other issues within the educational system, often leading to a loss of social networks (Rawjee & Reddy, 2012). Furthermore, alongside the native language of the host country, English is predominantly regarded as the lingua franca of the century. There is a growing demand for learning English, which has become an indispensable part of intercultural sensitivity development. Similarly, Ebrahimi (2023) asserts that a dominant language allows individuals to socially engage in communication.

With the aim of revealing the intercultural sensitivity levels of international students in Türkiye, this study combines empirical data with the precise perceptions of students. The paper primarily seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do international students possess intercultural sensitivity?

2. What are the perceptions and opinions of international students regarding intercultural sensitivity in Türkiye?

2. Literature review

A significant amount of previous literature on intercultural sensitivity and competence has focused on defining these concepts to establish common ideas and reach a shared understanding. As cultures transition to becoming intercultural, theoretical aspects that are not yet clearly defined are introduced, and actual interactions between cultures are influenced by countless variables and similarities (Fantini, 1995). Intercultural sensitivity, awareness, and competence have generally been associated with notions that align with global concepts. For instance, van Melle and Ferreira (2023) propose that intercultural sensitivity begins with recognizing the real differences between cultures and how these differences are often reflected in the approaches people use to communicate and relate to one another. As Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) indicate, certain qualities are key determinants of successful interactions with individuals from different cultures. They asserted that the critical indicators of success in intercultural contexts include an interest in other cultures, sufficient sensitivity to perceive cultural differences, and a willingness to adapt one's behavior out of respect.

To date, several studies have indicated that intercultural sensitivity is predominantly studied within the framework of cultural differences and similarities. According to Hammer et al. (2003), intercultural sensitivity can be defined as the capacity to differentiate and experience existing cultural differences. These relevant cultural differences primarily refer to distinctions constructed and shaped through cultural values and behaviors (Bennett, 2012).

2.1. Intercultural communicative competence

In exploring intercultural competence, the term and its associated concerns can be examined further. In a major study, Byram and Zarate (1996) identify intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as an essential skill for connecting with individuals from another culture using an international language. Byram's model comprises five dimensions, beginning with *savoir* (knowledge), which refers to an individual's knowledge about society. The second is *savoir-comprendre*, indicating the know-how of understanding and processing information. The third, *savoir-engager*, relates to awareness of cultural behaviors. On the other hand, *savoir-apprendre* concerns the ability to discover and explore a culture. Lastly, *savoir-être* focuses on perspectives and attitudes towards culture.

According to Deardorff (2009), a high level of intercultural sensitivity may also play a pivotal role in building confidence in intercultural competence. It can be stated that the interconnected nature of ICC and intercultural sensitivity makes it impossible to address one without considering the other. Similarly, Hammer et al. (2003) asserted that when individuals are only exposed to their own culture and values, they are more likely to have a narrow-minded perspective compared to individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds resulting from intercultural contact.

2.2. Intercultural sensitivity

According to Bennett (1986), intercultural sensitivity is associated with people's ability to reconstruct their cognitive and behavioral states, transitioning from rejection to acceptance stages where intercultural communication can be developed. Bennett (1993) proposed a different perspective, defining intercultural sensitivity as a developmental process in which individuals transform their affective and cognitive aspects from ethnocentric to ethno-relative stages. Additionally, he introduced the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Through this model, the concept of intercultural sensitivity is divided into six stages, ranging from ethnocentric stages, where individuals resist cultural differences, to ethno-relative stages, where differences are largely embraced.

It is generally believed that individuals with intercultural sensitivity can also predict, observe, and perceive emotional changes in intercultural contact (Triandis, 1977). Effective and intimate communication is not possible without respect (Adler & Proctor, 2023). A detailed examination of intercultural sensitivity, comprising six components—self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, non-judgment, social relaxation, and empathy—has been developed to reveal latent variables.

- *Self-esteem* plays a key role as it relates to self-image, a crucial aspect of intercultural sensitivity.
- *Self-monitoring* is significant for adapting reactions in response to changes in intercultural contact.
- *Open-mindedness* is another critical factor, as being receptive and attentive to interaction is essential for promoting effective communication.
- *Non-judgment* refers to a mental state where prejudice is reduced, enabling healthy interactions with individuals from different cultures.
- *Social relaxation* is a necessary affective factor for fostering intercultural awareness and openness.
- *Empathy* is also vital, rooted in the ability to reflectively understand and relate to the feelings of others, regardless of their cultural background (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Intercultural competence is also believed to provide deep insights into the social and linguistic skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for healthy intercultural communication opportunities (Wiseman & Koester, 1993).

2.3. The role of language in intercultural sensitivity

Supporting linguistic perspectives, the intercultural dimension in teaching international languages has become a predominant issue for educators and researchers in the field (Atay et al., 2009). As Cetinavci (2012) notes, it is impossible to design a language teaching program without aiming to make learners proficient in communicative aspects. Therefore, with the influence of a fast-developing world and the growing importance of intercultural sensitivity, it is increasingly difficult to overlook the role of language learning in motivating individuals to take necessary actions.

Before beginning their university programs in Türkiye, new international students who are not enrolled in English-taught courses are expected to complete a one-year language preparation course at the Turkish language teaching facility known as the *Türk Dili Öğretimi Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi* (TÖMER). These courses are designed to teach Turkish and help students bridge the gap between familiar and unfamiliar concepts, enabling them to achieve a considerable level of Turkish language proficiency.

2.4. International student mobility

The academic literature on intercultural sensitivity has facilitated the emergence of several themes involving student mobility and globalization processes. The rapidly growing concept of internationalization is challenging and reshaping the idea and practice of higher education. Nations and individual higher education institutions worldwide are implementing modified rules and procedures to attract more international students (Özoğlu et al., 2015). Emphasizing the concept in depth, İnce and Koçak (2018) asserted that international student mobility is increasing at an unprecedented rate globally, and Türkiye is one of the countries most affected by this trend due to its geographical, cultural, and economic potential. Türkiye is at the heart of a multicultural region, functioning as a natural bridge connecting the East and the West in the light of multiculturalism (Altan, 2018).

As of 2022, according to the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) statistics, Türkiye hosts over 300,000 international students, with numbers continuing to grow. As a multicultural country, modifications and requirements have been made to align with adaptation processes. In a randomized controlled study aimed at determining the variables that encourage students to study abroad and influence their choice of study destination, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) conducted a survey of 2,485 international students. They found that selecting a study location involves at least three distinct steps in the decision-making process.

First, students encounter various push factors related to their home countries, which typically have an unavoidable impact on their decision to study abroad. Once the decision to study abroad is made—or at least considered—a host country is chosen based on numerous factors. Accordingly, considerations related to potential host nations become crucial, as students tend to select one country over another for a variety of reasons.

However, much of the research to date has been theoretical, while international students often face overwhelming challenges during the adaptation stages of living in a new country. Furthermore, when their needs are not adequately met, international students may return to their home countries and discourage others from choosing the same destination for their studies (Macready & Tucker, 2011). According to McLachlan and Justice (2009), overseas students may also experience unexpected psychological issues such as loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, and depression. It is worth noting that cultural experiences that support their identities also create intercultural opportunities that can be beneficial for developing intercultural sensitivity.

3. Method

In this study, a mixed-methods design was implemented to reveal possible latent variables comprehensively by integrating statistical procedures with the perceptual insights of participants. One of the criteria for selecting a quantitative method was the objectivity of statistical data. Johnson and Christensen (2019) pointed out that quantitative researchers aim to operate under the assumption of objectivity. Mixed methods can be defined as "research in which the researcher gathers and analyzes data, combines the findings, and illustrates overviews by implementing both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4). Lastly, ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee to carry out the research.

3.1. Participants

The population of the study comprised international students who reside and study in Türkiye. The data was gathered during the spring semester of the 2022–2023 academic year through an online survey. A total of 38 international students (21 male and 17 female) with diverse social backgrounds and academic departments participated in the study. Their origins ranged from Asia to the Middle East. For the qualitative data collection, 9 international students (3 female and 6 male) participated. All participants voluntarily took part in the study.

Table 1. Participants

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	21	55,26
Female	17	44,74
Total	38	

Table 2. Participants' regions

Region	Number	Percent
North Africa	14	36,84
Middle East	12	31,57
Central Asia	7	18,42
Central Africa	4	10,52
Europe	1	2,65
Total	38	

As Table 2 illustrates, North African students are the majority in the study, with 36.84% participation. Following that, Middle Eastern students hold the second position with a 31.57% participation rate. Compared to other regions, Central Asian, Central African, and European students represent minority groups in the survey.

3.2. Instruments

The scale used in the study was adopted from Wang and Zhou's (2016) simplified 15-item *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (ISS-15) (Appendix A). The simplified version was adapted and redesigned from the 24-item ISS scale developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). The decision to use this scale was based on the reliability and validity tests conducted, as well as the practicality of the simplified scale compared to the 24-item version. The results demonstrated significant internal consistency and reliability scores.

Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A section was included in the scale to obtain the participants' consent. Moreover, the scale was divided into subscales based on the functions of the questions:

- Interaction Engagement: Items 1–3
- Respect for Cultural Differences: Items 4–6
- Interaction Confidence: Items 7–10
- Interaction Enjoyment: Items 11–13
- Interaction Attentiveness: Items 14–15

During the spring semester of the 2022–2023 academic year, data was collected using Google Forms. Successive alterations were implemented based on the opinions and recommendations of professors from the English Language Teaching Department to ensure the scale's reliability.

For the qualitative portion, a semi-structured interview consisting of five open-ended questions was conducted with voluntary participants, ensuring privacy concerns were addressed. Interviews were scheduled based on the participants' availability, with their consent to record the audio. Each interview

lasted approximately 15 minutes. The interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word, and coding was conducted verbatim.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data was first compiled using the MS Excel program and then analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0. To ensure reliability, a Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted, yielding a value of 0.81. For the qualitative part, after conducting the voluntary interviews, a content analysis was performed to derive academic insights based on the participants' perspectives. Highlighted remarks were extracted to emphasize the viewpoints of international students.

4. Results

To address the first research question, which aimed to investigate the levels of intercultural sensitivity (IS) among international students, quantitative descriptive statistics were obtained using the 15-item scale.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 3. International students' intercultural sensitivity levels based on the ISS-15 Scale

Scale Items	Mean (M)	SD
1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	4.53	0.64
2. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interactions.	4.08	0.81
3. I avoid situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons.	2.84	1.07
4. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.	1.82	1.11
5. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.	1.82	1.08
6. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.	1.74	0.79
7. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.	4.03	0.94
8. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.21	0.77
9. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.00	0.98
10. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.	1.62	0.86
11. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.	2.03	1.12
12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.	1.84	0.78
13. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.66	0.87
14. I am sensitive to my culturally distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.	3.39	0.88
15. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.11	0.68

Table 3 highlights several analytical points. Firstly, regarding interaction engagement items, unlike the lower mean scores for negative statements, items reflecting intercultural sensitivity and enjoyment towards different cultures demonstrated significantly high scores. The mean score for the first item is (*M*

= 4.53), indicating that most international students in the survey do not hesitate to interact with people from different cultures. This suggests that international students have a high level of enjoyment regarding intercultural interactions.

Similarly, the mean score for the second item (M = 4.08) implies that international students often communicate in an understandable and genuine manner, facilitating intercultural sensitivity. Item 3, with a relatively low mean (M = 2.84), supports the positive outlook on intercultural sensitivity levels by indicating students' openness to diverse cultural interactions.

One of the prominent aspects of intercultural sensitivity, confidence in interacting with individuals from different cultures, also scored higher than expected (M = 4.21). This demonstrates that international students feel assured in their ability to engage with others from diverse cultural backgrounds, further emphasizing their strong intercultural sensitivity levels.

Furthermore, with consistently high scores on the mentioned items, Item 4, which reflects a negative state of mind characterized by rejection and prejudice towards others, statistically shows an opposite score (M = 1.82). This indicates that most international students consider cultural differences as necessary and do not encounter significant problems with them, further highlighting their high levels of intercultural sensitivity. Similarly, Item 6, with its low score (M = 1.74), contributes to a deeper understanding of international students' perceptions, showing their respect for other cultures even before conversational opportunities occur.

International students showed an average score on an observational item, reflecting the relevance of ambiguity during their adaptation process. It is important to consider that students often navigate varying degrees of uncertainty while adjusting to a new cultural environment.

4.2. Interview analysis

To address the second research question, participants were asked about their intercultural interactions and concerns regarding intercultural sensitivity. All participating international students (6 male and 2 female) answered the questions voluntarily and structured their responses as they saw fit. Through discourse analysis, the study explored participants' specific feelings and statements, delving into social constructs and interdisciplinary dynamics. The responses were analyzed to conceptualize participants' opinions on perceptional realities, as follows:

Q1: Do you interact with people from cultures different from your own?

- P1: "I actually try to avoid interaction with my own culture because I do not see it as helpful in terms of improving my cultural sensitivity. Since I work in an international company, it is a part of my job and life, so I am really interested in interacting with different people."

- P3: “I interact with both. In fact, living in Bursa, I mostly interact with other internationals who are not Syrians like me. It is just a coincidence, I think. The international community here is well-connected, and even the Turks I interact with are usually connected to that community in some way or another.”

- P6: “Actually, I still keep in touch with people from my own country, Congo, but I have to say that Türkiye is a cosmopolitan country, and that’s why I interact with people from different cultures.”

Q2: As an international student, in what ways do you socialize in Türkiye?

- P4: “I try to find different ways to meet with people, and I usually go to the youth center where I can find so many people from different cultures.”

- P2: “I would describe myself as an introvert, and this makes me quite an antisocial person. But when I do socialize, I often prefer to have a cup of coffee with my friends, and they are mixed—some are Turkish and some are from different cultures.”

- P7: “I did not have the opportunity since my first term was online. However, I'd say that I built a good rapport with most of the other students. I would love to be more active in the student community and events, hopefully starting next term when my Turkish becomes better and classes become face-to-face.”

Q3: Are you open to interacting with Turkish people? If yes, how often?

- P5: “I do not have any preference whether the people I interact with are Turks or of any other nationality. As long as people are friendly, I'd love to interact with them as much as possible. However, being Syrian, it is more often than not that Turkish people won't be willing to interact with me; or worse, they believe the stereotypes, and we end up having negative interactions, though I do try to avoid it as much as possible.”

- P8: “Yes, I am. I think I liked Turkish people from the first time I came here. They’re so curious to know about you, so that makes it easy to communicate with them. I can say that I usually communicate with them.”

- P1: “I would say it happens ordinarily for me because I often meet different people from different cultures, including Turkish people. I am very interested in interacting with Turkish people.”

Q4: Do you think Turkish people are open-minded about different cultures?

- P5: “I might be wrong, but it seems that, in general, Türkiye is split into two, with very few people in the middle. So, the easterners are more conservative people and are more willing to accept and

be open-minded to cultures that are close to them; for example, they might learn Arabic. But the western part is different and closer to European ideas."

- P1: "It depends on the people, you know. But I have never had a bad experience, and I always felt close to them, and they just accepted me. It is also about personality, but I can say that they are open-minded."

- P4: "Once you come to Türkiye, you feel like you have come to the whole world because it is a culturally rich country. So, people are quite open-minded."

Q5: Is learning Turkish helpful for getting familiar with Turkish culture?

- P2: "It depends on how you learn it. If you learn it from a formal book, I don't think the cultural representations in Turkish coursebooks are accurate, at least from what I've seen in Bursa. If you learn it from the street and from interacting with people, then yes, it definitely opens up the chance to understand more."

- P6: "I've been living here for almost four years, and I can say that I speak English well, but learning the language is only one thing that can be helpful because learning the people is more important."

- P3: "If you don't know any Turkish, it might be hard, but it doesn't solve all the problems. I think we have to speak with Turkish people to become familiar with the culture. But I can say that it is helpful."

5. Discussion and conclusion

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the intercultural sensitivity levels of students both empirically and quantitatively, using a framework based on the perceptual opinions and perspectives of international students.

With respect to the first research question, statistical findings demonstrated that international students exhibited a considerable level of intercultural sensitivity, particularly in items related to adaptation and acceptance. These findings rigorously illustrated an optimistic inclination, as interpreted from the statistics. Similarly, in a study observing the intercultural sensitivity levels of pre-service ELT teachers, Cubukcu (2013) found that students primarily undergo adaptation when equipped with the necessary awareness to broaden their horizons.

Additionally, the observable and evident adaptation tendency aligns with the work of Bennett and Bennett (2004), who explicitly explained the first reconfiguration of worldview into cultural contexts. The core of *Ethnorelativism* is represented by the shift to acceptance, wherein values, beliefs, and behaviors are contextualized into distinct categories that differentiate them from one another. At this point, it was also noted that the equal yet distinct complexity of others is "accepted." However, this acceptance does not necessarily imply approval or agreement.

Therefore, based on the findings, it can also be asserted that it is possible to be ethnorelative while simultaneously disapproving of certain cultural aspects or disagreeing with the virtues of specific ideals.

Students at this stage do not believe that everyone in an opposite culture would agree with them if they could, as such disputes also occur in cultural contexts. The statistically demonstrated intercultural intimacy aligns with Chunhong and Griffiths (2011), who emphasized the critical importance of understanding cultural differences for cross-cultural communication and respecting them. In this vein, attempts have been made to unravel the complex network of intercultural differences in relation to different interaction-based behaviors (Ghadamyari & Jajarmi, 2024). Similarly, students should seize every opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to improve their intercultural communication skills. Activities such as participating in English corners at their colleges, making the most of international professors' office hours, and actively engaging in class activities that simulate intercultural contact are particularly beneficial.

A key challenge at this point is the acceptance configuration's intrinsic cultural relativity. Similarly, Arcagök and Cevdet (2020) investigated students' insights on intercultural sensitivity (IS) and concluded with a perplexing finding supporting the range of intercultural concerns students possess. These concerns, which include tolerance, respect, and empathy, are accounted for as developmental stages of IS. Furthermore, items 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, and 15, which reflect openness and tolerance towards others, were statistically significant in indicating intercultural sensitivity. Another notable finding from the analysis is that international students do not avoid interacting with people from different cultures.

In addressing the second research question, international students demonstrated a significant inclination towards Turkish people and society. The relationship between international students and Turkish people appears to be grounded in strong and precise foundations. The overall inclination towards items that reflect positive ethno-relative tendencies contributed significantly to the findings, thereby enhancing the understanding of international students' intercultural sensitivity levels. This finding aligns with Chen (2010), who found that ethnocentrism was best predicted by intercultural engagement. In other words, international students in Türkiye are openly engaged in and processing paths towards intercultural relations.

As one of the essential components of the 21st century, the primary function of interculturality is to enable individuals to recognize and embrace differences—attributes that are essential for fostering intercultural competence. The interviews and holistic discourse analysis provided interpretative frameworks for understanding the key insights highlighted by students. Many participants emphasized the role of language in cultivating intercultural sensitivity levels, as it plays a vital role in community integration.

The emphasis on the effectiveness of learning Turkish in facilitating adaptation highlights the utility of language. Returning to the existing research, a detailed examination of language's key role in IS levels among students was conducted by Atay et al. (2009). Their study yielded results suggesting that aspiring teachers should be provided with intercultural competency. Teacher education programs should incorporate cultural components into their curricula, such as courses on intercultural communication,

awareness, and proficiency. Examples of how language and culture instruction might be integrated can be provided to pre- and in-service teachers, inspiring them to explore innovative approaches to teaching culture. Over time, language instructors will become better equipped to incorporate cultural practices into their lessons as they gain expertise and understanding in this area.

It was also noted that the intercultural sensitivity levels of Turkish people depend on the context and cannot be generalized across society.

With the essential components of interculturality and the accelerating cultural exchange around the world, this research aimed to investigate the intercultural sensitivity levels of international students studying in Türkiye. Empirical studies indicate that international students have fostered their development through communication and socialization. However, beyond this empirical evidence, the use of Wang and Zhou's (2016) scale in this study provided data enriched by interviews, which helped build rapport and promote collaboration and cultural relationships with international students.

In a similar mixed-methods study, Yurtseven and Altun (2015) illustrated the importance of foreign contact in boosting IS levels. They found that, although the difference was not as significant as expected, having foreign friends played a crucial role in balancing and adjusting adaptation processes in culturally unfamiliar contexts and environments. From this perspective, interviews added valuable insights, shedding light on interpretable opinions that complemented numerical data.

Regarding the statistical means and in-depth interview analyses that paved the way for a detailed understanding, it is evident that international students in Türkiye are interculturally sensitive and tolerant towards others. Furthermore, their remarks strongly suggest that their experience of living in a foreign country has contributed to their empathy, openness, and intercultural sensitivity, particularly through their optimistic attitudes towards cultural differences. As verbally expressed in the interviews, their communicative eagerness and tendency towards intercultural awareness appeared to be associated with practical experience gained through direct encounters with a distinctive culture. Living in a different country immerses individuals in new cultural contexts, which facilitates this development.

Such exposure helps individuals understand and appreciate cultural differences, including customs, traditions, and social norms. Moreover, engaging with a new language fosters deeper connections with locals and enhances communication skills. Language learning, in particular, is tied to cultural understanding as it reveals nuances and perspectives unique to a culture. More importantly, first-hand experiences challenge preconceived notions and stereotypes. By interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, individuals can develop a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of others. They also form friendships with people from different backgrounds, which promotes personal growth and intercultural dialogue. These relationships increase empathy and reduce ethnocentrism.

As a result of these factors, navigating unfamiliar environments helps students develop flexibility and adaptability—skills that are crucial for effectively interacting with people from different cultures and becoming globally competent citizens equipped with 21st-century skills.

It is undeniable that living abroad broadens one's worldview, encourages critical thinking about global issues, and fosters a sense of interconnectedness. Despite the challenges and difficulties often associated with living in a foreign country, these experiences contribute to personal development, resilience, and self-awareness, which are vital for understanding others. Overall, studying and living abroad is a transformative experience that fosters intercultural sensitivity, enriching both personal and professional lives.

Our study contradicted the notion that staying in a foreign country is overwhelmingly difficult to manage. Instead, the findings indicate a noticeable openness among students to interacting with other cultures, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. From a holistic perspective, the research conjures a comprehensive image of efficient intercultural awareness when students are exposed to a different culture for a significant amount of time.

Beyond the academic programs and departments that they choose, the social competence gained through intercultural interactions plays a groundbreaking role in their adaptation process and future endeavors. In other words, such experiences not only enhance intercultural sensitivity but also foster cognitive growth, critical thinking, and the essential skills needed to thrive as global citizens in the 21st century.

The exploration of adaptation processes and the role of language has created a foundation for building cross-cultural collaborations. Another important implication from the study is that cultivating intercultural sensitivity in Turkish society equips students with valuable skills that are highly regarded in today's globalized world. These skills enable them to engage in meaningful conversations, appreciate diversity, and become effective global citizens.

In addition to educational factors, the undeniable role of governmental and institutional policies must not be overlooked. These policies should address intercultural issues with a global perspective and align with the needs of an increasingly interconnected world.

Furthermore, based on students' perceptions of language learning, it should be noted that educational institutions play a critical role in promoting intercultural sensitivity. This can be achieved through curriculum design, diversity and inclusion initiatives, multicultural events, and fostering intercultural interactions within and beyond the classroom.

For future research, the issue of context presents an intriguing avenue for exploration. Further studies should include a larger and more diverse participant pool to investigate the links between regions and sociocultural perceptions. Exploring cultural notions that lie at the intersection of complex social dynamics should be conducted in a sensitive and sociological manner.

Ultimately, understanding students' intercultural sensitivity—including cultural norms, values, respectful behaviors, and tolerance levels—has the potential to foster significant positive impacts within the Turkish context. These insights could be further developed in alignment with 21st-century skills and globalization.

Disclosure statement

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APPENDIX A

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Subscale	Item No.	Items
Interaction Engagement	1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
	2	I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interacting.
	3	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.
Respect for Cultural Differences	4	I don't like to be with people from different cultures.
	5	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.
	6	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.
Interaction Confidence	7	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.
	8	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.
	9	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.
Interaction Enjoyment	10	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.
	11	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
	12	I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.
Interaction Attentiveness	13	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.
	14	I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.
	15	I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Do you interact with people from different cultures or from your own culture?
2. As an international student, in what ways do you socialize in Türkiye?
3. Are you open to interaction with Turkish people, If yes, how often?
4. Do you think Turkish people are open-minded about different cultures?
5. Is Turkish learning helpful for getting familiar with Turkish culture?

About the author

Yiğit Salihoğlu is currently an EFL instructor at Hitit University, Türkiye. His research interest focuses on linguistics within cultural issues related to English language learning.

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The Development of Program Format Adaptation in Nordic Public Service Television

Heidi Keinonen[1]

University of Turku, Finland

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Abstract

As highly standardized products of the commercialized and globalized television industry, program formats constitute a potential threat to public service broadcasting and national television industries. Despite their complex relationship with format imports and adaptations, public service broadcasters have produced format adaptations for decades. By examining the characteristics and development of format imports and adaptation in Finnish public service broadcasting, this article provides periodization from the 1960s to the 2020s. Finland is one of the Nordic Media Welfare States, but unlike its peers, it has had both commercial and public service television since the late 1950s, which resulted in a more competitive media environment. While formats provided many benefits to Yle, the Finnish public service broadcaster, they have also been a source of controversy for decades. Through periods of casual adaptations (1960s–1980s) as well as ambitious experimentation and long-lasting successes (1990s–2000s), Yle finally entered the age of format development and export in the 2010s.

Keywords

program format, public service broadcasting, adaptation, globalization, television production

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1944-4894 | heidi.keinonen@utu.fi

* School of History, Culture and Arts Studies, University of Turku, Finland

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1. Introduction

Format adaptation has been claimed to contradict almost everything that public service broadcasting has historically stood for. Commercial global franchises that often represent entertainment genres have been claimed to constitute a potential threat to public service broadcasting and national television industries by importing highly standardized cultural products and eroding the creativity of local production companies (Jensen, 2013). Traditionally, PSB had to "serve the nation" and help to consolidate, build and transmit a national culture. In addition, in-house production has been favored and proudly emphasized (Bourdon, 2012). Nevertheless, public service broadcasters have produced format adaptations for decades, often with special focus on public services.

What exactly is this public service focus and how has it transformed over time? This study examines the characteristics and development of format adaptation in Finnish public service broadcasting from the 1960s to the 2020s. This study aims to shed light on the fluctuations and complexities of format adaptation in the public service context and, as a result, provide a periodization of format adaptation at the public service broadcaster Yle. This article presents numerous examples of format adaptation–innovative experimentations, success stories, and failures alike.

Research on television formats flourished in television studies in the late 2000s and the 2010s, but since then, it has mostly been replaced by issues related to streaming services and platformization. Overall, few publications have focused on format adaptation in the context of public service broadcasting (for example Jensen 2013; Esser & Jensen, 2015). However, the significance of program formats for the television industry has not diminished, and streaming services such as Netflix have entered the format business by producing multiple local adaptations of formats such as Love. Thus, this article contributes to the study of the globalization and transnationalization of media, and more specifically, to television studies and format studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. The Finnish media system

Finland is a small country with a population of 5.5 million. Situated in Northern Europe between Russia and Sweden, it is one of the Nordic Media Welfare States known for housing an adaptive public media sector with a high degree of legitimacy, complemented by domestically and globally successful media companies (Syvertsen et al., 2014). However, a unique national language distinguishes Finland from the neighbouring countries and the rest of the world.

Regular ad-funded television transmissions were launched by a group of radio engineers in 1956. Finland, along with the UK, was the one of the few European countries, which had both commercial and public service television. Yle's television was established in 1958 with advertising-funded Mainos-TV (later MTV) leasing airtime from Yle's channels. The Finnish broadcasting market was characterized by a

duopoly of public service and commercial television until the 1990s, when MTV got a channel of its own. The independent production sector emerged only after the great channel reform. Since then, the market has become more competitive with several linear television channels and streaming services. Now, both Yle and the commercial channels commission most of their fictional programming from independent production companies, which, in most cases, are subsidiaries of global media giants, such as Fremantle and Banijay.

The transformation was initiated in the 1980s, when Nordic party politics took a turn to the right transforming the media welfare state towards a competition state. In addition to the emerging neoliberalism, the Nordic Model was challenged by increasing globalization (Syvertsen et al., 2014). As the global format trade emerged in the 1990s, Finnish television companies were also adopting the trend and airing format adaptations. However, the number of format adaptations was relatively low during the first decade of the 2000s (Keinonen, 2018). While the 21st century has witnessed the export of a few Finnish formats, Finland has remained a net importer of program formats (Nylund, 2016).

2.2. Program format and format adaptation

In format studies, television format is defined as a program concept that has been sold and replicated outside its original territory. It is a complex cultural commodity, in which four dimensions can be identified. First, as format is a remake produced under license, it has a legal dimension. Second, format as a recipe combines immutable rules and principles with adaptable elements, but it also creates drama and an outcome week in and week out. Third, format is a proof-of-concept and, as such, provides risk management and predictability for television companies. Fourth, format as a method of production involves transfer of accumulated production expertise in the form of format bible and production consultancy (Chalaby, 2016). While all these dimensions can usually be identified in every program format, there is great variation in how detailed these dimensions are. Paper format, for example, is a format that has not yet been produced in the home market, and therefore, does not provide a track record. Similarly, a production format only includes information on the management and organization of a certain type of production, such as daily drama, while the content is created by the format buyer (Keinonen, 2017).

Most format scholars agree that the adaptation of television format is not simply about ‘filling the format with local content’ (Waisboard, 2004) but an interactive process including negotiation among different television cultures. Formats do not remain intact but are being developed by considering the experiences and innovations of different adaptations. Formats thus reflect the prominent characteristics of television cultures all over the globe–that is, the never-ending borrowings, inspirations and frequent exchanges of ideas and aesthetics (Agger, 2006). The need for adaptation is often explained by the idea of cultural proximity: viewers prefer programming that is culturally the most proximate (Straubhaar, 2007; see also Keinonen, 2009). The basic level of adaptation includes the translation of the texts and the use of national/local hosts, actors and participants, but in most cases, localization extends far beyond that and includes multiple sites and factors. The concept of cultural negotiation refers to a wide range of meaning-making processes within production, text, and reception, and includes both material and symbolic aspects.

Cultural negotiation thus includes business negotiations concerning the terms of the format contract, the discussions regarding adaptation, as well as the interpretation by the viewers (Keinonen, 2016a).

The global format industry is dominated by a relatively small number of giants, which develop and distribute formats, and produce local adaptations through their subsidiaries. A format can be acquired by a national television company for inhouse production or to be adapted by a local production company. Production companies may also pitch formats to the broadcasters. Due to the heavy outsourcing of program production format adaptations are now usually produced by production companies, which therefore balance between global influences and the national television cultures (Keinonen, 2016a). To commission a format adaptation, a broadcaster needs to find a format that matches the programming policy, target audience, and schedule.

Public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters have different values, obligations and audiences (see Jensen 2009; Esser & Jensen, 2015). Adapting a commercial format to public service television thus usually demands careful consideration. Apart from differences in national and/or local cultures and production cultures, financial issues often contribute to the need for adaptation. Production budgets in Finland are usually far lower than in the other Nordic countries, not to mention the UK or US. Therefore, Finnish production companies need to find less expensive ways to produce the program while making sure that the overall look of the program remains the same (Keinonen, 2016a). As Aveyard et al. (2016, p. 5) summarize, "studying some of the many instances of broadcast remaking inside particular national boundaries over the longer term helps reveal more complex patterns of international contact than often supposed". Studying the characteristics and development of format adaptation in Finnish public service broadcasting may thus reveal continuities and changes that illuminate the common patterns of globalization and transnationalization.

3. Method

The study builds on my previous research on format import and adaptation in Finland by combining the results with a new data set. The newly collected data contains thematic interviews, archival documents, and television texts. The data was collected in 2023–2024 for the Yle 100 Research Programme, which Yle launched to commemorate the company's 100th anniversary in 2026. The comprehensive four-year research project involves four Finnish universities. The Research Programme has granted me a unique access to Yle's archives, personnel, and databases thus revealing new data that was not available during my previous projects.

The interviews with Yle's producers and commissioners provided me with first-hand information about the processes of acquiring and adapting program formats at a public service broadcaster. As Bruun (2016) suggests, I consider my interviewees as exclusive informants. While the interviewees may represent cultural elite and act as "gatekeepers", they differ from elite interviewees, who are expected to provide insight into the elite itself. My interviewees cannot be regarded as expert informants, either, as they cannot be replaced by other experts. Exclusive informants are irreplaceable (Bruun, 2016).

In the vein of triangulation, the interviews, archival documents, and television texts were analysed together. By combining earlier results and new data the article covers a period from the 1960s to the 2020s and provides a periodization of format import and adaptation at the public service broadcaster. The three periods (Casual format adaptation 1960s–1980s, Ambitious experimentation and long-lasting success 1990s–2000s, and Entering format development 2010s–) and their definitive characteristics are introduced by presenting examples from each period.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Casual format adaptations (1960s–1980s)

The roots of the program format trade have been traced all the way back to the 1940s' radio, but the credit of being the first television format has been given to *What's My Line*, which started on CBS in the United States in 1950. The quiz show was the first program, for which the broadcasting company acquired the concept, not only the scripts (Moran, 2013, 2016). In format research the decades from the 1950s to the 1980s/1990s have been described as a period of random or casual adaptations (Moran, 2013; Bourdon, 2012), and this also characterizes Yle's format adaptations until the end of the 1980s.

Yle's television inherited some of its genres, programming practices and personnel from public service radio, but the channel was also affected by the existence of commercial television. TES-TV, a regional television station operated by radio amateurs and funded by advertising, was already established, and Mainos-TV was leasing airtime from Yle's channel thus contributing to the establishment and funding of Yle's television. Therefore, public service television in Finland was born in a competitive environment. Both commercial television companies were adapting foreign program ideas as early as in the 1950s and 1960s–though without paying any license fees. Programs such as *Tupla ta kuitti* (*Double or quit*) and *Levyraati* (*Jukebox Jury*) became the longest-running shows on Finnish television (Keinonen, 2018). Scripted programs were also adapted early on. Mainos-TV acquired the scripts of the British sitcom *Hancock's Half Hour* and produced a Finnish adaptation titled *Kaverukset* in 1962–1963. Despite high viewer ratings, the show was cancelled after two years as the scripts were not particularly suited for the main actor's acting style. However, the main character lived on in a spin-off series written by a Finnish scriptwriter (Keinonen, 2009).

These early 'pre-formats' represent, as Moran states (2015), a regime in which sporadic and incidental imitation was widespread in television industries. However, it was apparently Yle who first contracted a format for legal adaptation. *Romper Room* was created in the United States in the 1950s and soon thereafter licensed by several broadcasters both in the US and abroad. The show is often named as one of the earliest television formats (Moran, 2009).

After TES-TV (later Tesvisio) encountered financial difficulties, Yle acquired the company and transformed it into television channel 2 in the mid 1960s. A few years later, TV2 was aiming to increase the amount of children's programming but was struggling with a restricted budget and the lack of staff at

the Department of Entertainment. Licensing a program format appeared as a cost-effective solution, and, instead of developing a new children's programme Yle TV2 decided to rely on an adaptation of *Romper Room*. The show was aired by the name of *Tenavatuokio/Toddler Trice* in 1968–1969 and 1973–1974, and produced inhouse, as all the programs at that time. *Tenavatuokio* was characterized as the biggest renewal of the channel in the spring season of 1968. Unlike any other children's program on Yle, *Tenavatuokio* was broadcast three times a week at the request of the distributor (Keinonen, 2016b).

The title of show provides an excellent example of cultural negotiation. Despite being a format franchise, *Tenavatuokio* was drawing from the existing national television culture as the title had a long history in Finnish television. Both the commercial broadcaster Mainos-TV and the local television station Tamvisio had broadcast children's programming using the same title in the 1950s and 1960s. While these shows had nothing to do with *Romper Room*, the title was already known by the audience and thus capable of producing cultural proximity for the new program (Keinonen, 2016b).

The episodes consisted of games, book readings, and other activities with children. The hostess of the show was a central figure in adapting the program format: she translated the English scripts in Finnish and introduced new ideas to the program. However, the British producer and scriptwriter of *Romper Room*, Joy Thwaytes, visited Finland and supervised the production carefully. In addition to scripts, the format package included props and kindergarten furniture, various materials and ideas, musical tapes or discs as well as promotional material. The *Romper Room* toys, such as bee puppets, hobbyhorses, round-abouts and musical instruments played a major part in the show. They also became one of the main sites of cultural negotiation, as they provoked discussion in the press and in the Department of Entertainment: the excessive amount of the toys as well as their foreign origin was criticized. The toys caused controversy also because they were not available in Finland. Throughout the production, Yle aimed at adapting the program to the Finnish context. Despite being a popular children's program, *Tenavatuokio* did not quite meet the educational objectives of the public service broadcaster. When the program was cancelled in 1974, it was replaced by original content (Keinonen, 2016b).

During the period of casual format adaptations, only few formats were licensed and adapted in Finland. Even fewer became long-lasting hits–others were replaced by original programming. However, it is noteworthy that the public service broadcaster was paving the way in establishing authorized format adaptations and, consequently, format trade in Finland.

4.2. Ambitious experimentation and long-lasting success (1990s–2000s)

According to Moran (2013), Chalaby (2012) and Bourdon (2012), the systematic format trade was established in the 1980s and 1990s. The change was linked to the adoption of new distribution technologies, such as cable and satellite television and the overall commercialization of broadcasting which increased the demand for content (Moran, 2013). This was also the time of increasing globalization in television industry.

In Finland, the professional format trade started in the 1990s with the import of formats such as *The Wheel of Fortune (Onnenpyörä,* MTV3, 1993-2001*), The Lyrics Board (Bumtsibum!* MTV3, 1997-2005) *and Who Wants to be a Millionaire (Haluatko miljonääriksi,* Nelonen 1999-2004, MTV3, 205-2007, Nelonen, 2016-) (Keinonen, 2018). It was the commercial television companies who were adapting the global hits, but Yle was also establishing a more active format policy. As Tiina Rautkorpi has stated, two major transformations led to this. The first was the big channel reform in 1993, when MTV removed its programs from Yle channels to MTV3 channel. Four years later, another commercial channel called Nelonen was established. As a result, a more competitive era for Yle was launched and the field of independent production companies grew and became more diverse. Second, Yle's obligation of providing diverse programming was included in the new Yle law. Because of these two changes, Yle aimed at both standardizing program production and producing diverse content (Rautkorpi, 2011).

In the 1990s, Yle's interest in formats was often characterized by technological experimentation. *Hugo* (1993–1995), for example, was an interactive game show for children. The program was an adaptation of the Danish *Skærmtrolden Hugo* format, in which players controlled a troll character by telephone keyboard on live television broadcast. It was one of the first interactive games in the 1990s (Yle, 2020/2021). Interactivity was also experimented in a drama production titled *Kahden vaiheilla* (1994), which was an adaptation of South American Globo TV's format *Voce Decide* (You decide) (Veiga-Pires 1994). Every episode consisted of a pre-recorded drama based on scripts that were included in the format package and adapted to Finland. The drama inserts alternated with live studio broadcasts in which the host introduced the story and two optional solutions for the dilemma. The viewers were able to vote for the preferred solution by telephone. The ending that gained more votes was then aired at the end of the episode (Yle, 1994; T. Tuovinen, personal communication, May 10, 2024). The storylines often involved moral dilemmas that concerned family-life or romantic relationships. As Timoteus Tuovinen (personal communication, May 10, 2024), who discovered the format while working at Yle's international program acquisition department recalls, it was the morality-like character of the stories as well as the opportunity to experiment with interactivity that made Yle license the format. The show did not, however, find its audience (Tuominen, 1994).

Another format adaptation titled *Pilkkopimeetä* (1997) provides an interesting example in which the long tradition of cooperation between the Nordic public service broadcasters was combined with the globalizing format trade and an efficient production machine. The adaptation of a British-Japanese format featured contestants performing tasks in a dark room. The show was shot by using a new BVS (Behind the Visible Spectrum) technology, which enabled the viewers to see what happened in the room. *Pilkkopimeetä* also pioneered as the first so-called 'carousel production' at Yle: four Nordic public service broadcasters recorded their shows at the SVT studio in Gothenburg, Sweden, by using the same cameras and staging, and thus considerably decreasing their production costs (Yle, 1997; Yle, 2009). The practice of shooting multiple adaptations of big reality formats in dedicated 'production hubs' became more common in the 2000s.

Yle was also interested in experimenting with genre hybrids and reality television. Jean K. Chalaby (2016) states that format trade and reality television became intertwined in the late 1990s when *Survivor*, one of the so-called super formats emerged, but, in fact, earlier examples do exist. The novelty of *Heartmix* (1996), the adaptation of Music Television's *The Real World* format, laid in the combination of scripted material and the real live events of the participants. The show was shot mainly in San Francisco, where seven young Finns shared a house. The production pursued to be quick and depict the events in real time: the episodes were shot and edited on location and aired within two weeks from shooting. The format was pitched to Yle by the production company, but as the collaboration reached a dead end and the show did not manage to find its target audience, it was cancelled after the first season (Yle, 1996; Yle, n.d.a; Yle, n.d.b; O. Tola, personal communication, February 1, 2024; Ruoho, 2001; Hautakangas, 2007).

While most of the format adaptations only lived for one season, some of them became the most successful programs at Yle. These include *Uutisvuoto* (1998–2018), an adaptation of the British comedy quiz show *Have I Got News for You*. In this comedy panel, two teams consisting of permanent captains and changing members compete in identifying the news of the week. The first reactions to the show were dubious, which may also explain why *Uutisvuoto* was never promoted as a format adaptation. However, the popularity of the program along with the overall internationalization of Finnish television culture brought about a more permissible approach towards format adaptions at Yle (Keinonen, 2018). Another example of a successful format adaptation is *Tartu mikkiin*, a localization of the Danish musical game show *Grib Mikrofonen*, which was aired by TV2 in 2006–2015. Despite a few exceptions, such as *Kahden vaiheilla*, format adaptations in 1990s and early 2000s were mainly pitched and produced for Yle by independent production companies.

The early 2000s saw a surge of the so-called super formats (*Who wants to be a Millionaire/Haluatko miljonääriksi,* Nelonen 1999–2005, 2016–2020, 2022, 2023 and MTV3 2005–2007; *Popstars,* MTV3 2002, 2004; *Idols/Idols Suomi,* MTV3 2003-2013; *Big Brother,* Sub 2005–2014) in Finnish television, but all these formats were aired cy commercial channels. The overall number of format adaptations on Yle's channels remained few (Keinonen, 2018). Despite adopting a more active format policy, aiming for a diverse programming, and experimenting with technology and interactivity in the 1990s, Yle still had a complex relationship with format industry. The few successful format adaptations were not able to establish formats as a permanent part of Yle's programming.

4.3. Entering format development (2010s–)

In the early 2000s, a realization occurred at Yle, that some of the company's longest running and popular program, such as *Uutisvuoto* and *Tartu mikkiin*, were format adaptations. There had been a discussion about the need to deliver international quality content to younger target audiences. While this need was, in part, met by airing HBO's quality dramas, there was also an attempt to raise the bar in original programming. In addition, the taste of the Finnish audience had become more international. Thus, the changes at Yle and in the surrounding media environment resulted in a more transnational programming

policy. In 2012, Yle established a 'format team' to search for formats that would fit public service programming. The selected formats would then be adapted as inhouse productions (Keinonen, 2018).

As the team described, the main criteria for selecting formats were the originality of the content, adaptability, and the track record (especially in the Nordic countries which still provide a benchmark for Yle). The acquisition of format rights was often hindered by the cost of the license fees which could be as high as 30.000–60.000 euros. Also, the fact that many formats include product placement, which is not allowed at Yle, lead to a significant increase in production budgets. Cultural negotiation also concerned the program content. Yle's 58-minute program slot posed dramaturgic challenges, as most formats were written for 22-minute slots with commercial breaks. Obviously, program formats also needed to meet the public service values, which at that time meant that they were able to combine facts with emotions or include a societal dimension which provided the audience food for thought and an opportunity to participate in public debate (Keinonen, 2018). As Pia Majbritt Jensen states, in adaptation 'formats are made to correspond with their respective broadcaster and channel's identity' (Jensen, 2013). In this case, the products of the commercial format industry had to be localized for not only to the Finnish audience but also to the public service ethos.

The establishment of the format team as well as a number of successful format adaptations, such as the standup competition *Naurun tasapaino* (*Show Me The Funny*, 2013–2015), further contributed to more favourable opinions regarding Yle's format appropriation. However, Yle was still trying to find a balance between the public service values and the competitive television environment. The fragile nature of this balance was clearly indicated by the adaptation of the British format *Got to Dance* (*Pakko tanssia*, 2013).

As earlier research has shown, it was only around 2010, that the number of format adaptations in Finnish television saw a significant increase (Keinonen, 2018). Various talent show formats, including those featuring dance, had grown into global franchises and popular culture phenomena. In Finland, commercial channels were airing adaptations of *Got Talent*, *Idols* and *The Voice*. Yle had also been looking for a big entertainment format and eventually decided to commission *Pakko tanssia*, which had the potential to attract different demographics, and particularly the huge number of Finnish dance enthusiasts. A few months before the show went on air in early 2013, the format ignited an intense public debate. Finnish tabloids published articles questioning the legitimacy of Yle adapting international formats instead of developing 'local' content. This contributed to negative audience expectations, and the shiny-floor dance show failed to attract large audiences (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Keinonen, 2016b; Keinonen, 2018).

Pakko tanssia was cancelled after the first season. A member of the format team and the executive producer of the show at EndemolShine Finland both believe, that the public debate resulted in low audience ratings. In addition, the newly emerged digital channels and social media outlets were taking their share of the viewers' spare time. Thus, the adaptation was rather a victim of the ongoing public debate about the funding and obligations of public service broadcasting, than a failure in itself. At Yle, the show was considered a legitimate choice as it featured a variety of dance styles, including wheelchair

dance, which made it well suited with the public service values. (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Keinonen, 2018; Keinonen, 2016). Unlike the Danish public service broadcaster DR, which adapted traditional entertainment formats, such as *X Factor, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,* and *Strictly Come Dancing* (Esser & Jensen, 2015), Yle emphasized the public service aspect.

The decision to cancel *Pakko tanssia* eased the tension between the public service broadcaster and the commercial television companies. In addition, Yle reconsidered its format policy: the format team was dismantled and Yle decided to focus on format development. The complex relationship with program formats was normalised and formats were established as part of the daily work in every genre. All these changes would not have been possible without the accomplishments of the format team and the knowhow acquired through format adaptation (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Keinonen, 2018). For Yle, the value of format adaptations lies not just in the opportunity to air popular programs. The appropriation of foreign program formats has provided Yle with the knowledge and skills needed in developing Finnish formats that can travel abroad. Scanning the global format trade has also taught local producers to evaluate the format potential of their own programs as well as to develop scalable and streamlined production processes (Keinonen, 2018).

While Yle still airs a few popular format adaptations, such as *Sohvaperunat* (2015–), the Finnish adaptation of the British reality show *Gogglebox,* which features ordinary people watching television and commenting the shows in their own living rooms, they have also managed to establish themselves as format developers and to create programs that have caught the attention of international buyers. *Mental* (*Sekasin*, 2016–2021) is a youth drama developed by Yle and a production company called It's Alive Films. Located in a closed ward at a psychiatric hospital, the series feature stories that are based on the real-life experiences of recovering mental health patients. Local adaptations of the show have been produced in France and Germany (Yle, 2016/2016).

After completing four seasons on Yle, the hospital drama *Syke* (*Nurses,* 2014–2017) was commissioned by the Finnish commercial broadcaster Nelonen. It has also been remade in Sweden with the title *Syrror*. *SuomiLOVE* (2014–2022) is a sentimental music entertainment show in which the attendants surprise their loved ones with the performances of their favourite songs. The show, developed in collaboration with Warner Bros. International Television Production Finland, attracted huge audiences on Yle's channels. Adaptations of the format titled *Soundtrack of Love* have already been produced in Belgium, Estonia, Switzerland and Cyprus. After the show was cancelled by Yle, the Finnish commercial channel MTV3 started to air the show in 2024 (A. Nurmi, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Warner Bros. International Television Production Finland, 2024). While it's not uncommon that formats developed by Yle travel to other Finnish channels, this was the first time a big Finnish entertainment show outweighed the global hit shows.

By scouting, commissioning, producing, and airing numerous format adaptations for decades Yle has increased the respective knowledge both inhouse and in production companies. Since 2010s they have also contributed to the development and export of Finnish program formats. While the public service

context has not been an easy ground for the import and adaptation of foreign formats, it has proved to be a unique asset in terms of format export. The Nordic public service broadcasters from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland have coproduced television programs for decades and thus established permanent forms of collaboration. In recent years, the public service broadcasters have granted each other access to their program formats before they introduce the formats at the international trade markets. The Nordic network thus advances the sale of Finnish programs abroad (Keinonen, 2018). However, Finland has not yet been able to mimic the success of Swedish and Danish Nordic noir dramas, which have travelled the world as ready-mades and remakes (cf. Hill, 2016).

5. Conclusions

This article set out to examine the characteristics of format adaptation in public service broadcasting and, as a result, to produce a periodization of format adaptation at Yle. Public service broadcasting represents a deviant case in the globalized and commercialized television industry—public service values and public funding often entail a mixed format policy which demands more cultural negotiation than the revenue-driven approach of the commercial broadcasters. However, format trade is not an unknown territory for public service broadcasters.

It is noteworthy, that unlike the commercial television companies in Finland, Yle entered format import quite early by adopting the US children's program *Romper Room*. The adaptation marks the beginning of legal format trade in Finnish television. Nevertheless, the period from the 1960s to the 1980s can be described as a time of casual adaptations, as only a few localizations were broadcast on Yle's channels. The programming consisted mainly of original inhouse productions and imported ready-mades. The 1990s witnessed a remarkable transformation, and the decade was characterized by various technological experiments. While the increase in the number of format adaptations may have been modest, the programs introduced new forms of participation and reality television. The most innovative shows were rather short-lived, but format adaptations representing more traditional genres, such as comedy panel and game show, became successes in the early 2000s.

For the first 15 years of the new millennium, Yle had an extremely complex relationship with format import and adaptation. The establishment of the so-called format group did not bring a sudden change, but over time, popular format adaptations and the lessons learned from format trade helped in establishing formats in Yle's programming. Finally, around 2015, Yle entered the format export with some home-grown programmes that sold abroad. For Yle, the adaptation of foreign program formats (in addition to the increasing sale of ready-made drama), was a central way to become a serious player in the international television market (see also Jensen, 2013).

As Esser and Jensen (2015) have demonstrated, there is great variation between PSBs in terms of format policy. Yle has been prioritizing the public service values by airing diverse programs with a socio-cultural dimension. As the results of this study demonstrate, one can also find great temporal variation within each public service broadcaster. While PSBs are losing their specificity and becoming increasingly similar to

other (commercial) media companies, they are still the leading figures in their respective media markets. Therefore, the analysis of their format appropriation also sheds light to the complexities of the surrounding national television industries.

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About the author

Heidi Keinonen is a Senior Research Fellow at the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. Her areas of expertise include television studies, media industry research, broadcasting, and media history. She has been doing research on media and teaching Media Studies at the universities of Turku and Tampere since 2004.

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Cultural Adaptation in Dubbing of Video Games: The Case of Taboo Items in Persian

Parisa Fouladi[1]

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

Mohammad Reza Hashemi[2*]

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

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Abstract

The primary aim of this paper is to explore cultural adaptation in the English to Persian dubbing of video games. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the translation of offensive terms in an audio-localized video game that originally featured a wide range of offensive languages. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (2004), localized by Cyber Persian Games, was chosen as the case study, in which 611 source–target segments were analyzed based on the models developed by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, 2014) and Khoshsaligheh et al. (2018). The strategies used in the Persian audio-localized version of the video game were euphemism, deletion, maintenance, neutralization, manipulation, amplification, taboo substitution, reformulation, generalization, addition, and loan. Further analysis suggested that the localization company's approach was driven by the need to suppress as many taboo elements as possible, which was manifested in their attempts to conform to the target culture's norms rather than those of the source culture, consistent with the dominant conventions approved by the recipients.

Keywords

audiovisual translation, censorship, cultural localization, dubbing, video games

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[1] https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7782-6462 | ✉ sweetpari.f97@gmail.com
[2] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9437-131x | ✉ hashemi@um.ac.ir

[*] Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

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1. Introduction

Video game localization is a process guided by the goal of adapting texts, graphics, audio, and gameplay to meet the cultural and legal expectations of a target audience (Bernal-Merino, 2020), with dubbing presenting special challenges. It is not only a matter of language translation, but also cultural mediation. According to O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), the dubbing of audio and cinematic assets such as voiceovers and songs demands cultural insight, while the localization process also emphasizes the importance of narrative text and graphical elements.

The importance of game localization has grown in tandem with the increasing globalization of the video game industry. According to Chandler and Deming (2011), the global market is "a key strategic focus" for many game developers (p. xiii). Thus, promoting and marketing games in international markets depend enormously on localization. Reiss's (1981) framework on text types emphasizes that translations for advertising and entertainment must resonate with the audience's cultural sensibilities to achieve the intended effect, which, in the case of video games, typically fosters player engagement and drives sales. This aligns with the widely held agenda that successful game localization often prioritizes the target culture over the source culture, ensuring that the localized version resonates with players in the new market (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013).

Game localization extends beyond translation. For example, in Iran, various aspects of media, from movies to books, and increasingly, video games have to comply with strict Islamic cultural norms and censorship, overseen by authorities like the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2016). For example, content regarding alcohol, immodest clothing, and pre-marital relationships is frequently altered to suit local standards (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021, 2022; Zoraqi & Mousavi, 2024). Additional complications for localization efforts in Iran can be traced back to political and economic factors like sanctions and piracy, which has hindered resources and discouraged game developers from investing in the Persian market (Šisler, 2013). Taboo language, in particular, needs to be carefully adapted via strategies such as substitution and euphemism in the Persian media landscape (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2014; Samir, 2023).

Over the last two decades, censorship has become an increasingly important issue within the localization of video games (Fernández Costales, 2012; Zhang, 2012). Studies on cultural adaptation in video games have already been undertaken (e.g. Di Marco, 2007; Dong & Mangiron, 2018; Zoraqi & Mousavi, 2024), but few have focused on the specific strategies for dealing with offensive language in dubbed games. This gap is especially notable in the Persian context, where censorship regulations restrict violence, sexual content, and offensive language. Investigation into how localization professionals overcome these challenges provides us with an accurate understanding of game localization in Iran. Examining a popular dubbed video game that originally featured a wide array of offensive language, this research attempts to uncover censorship in the Persian localization. The study compares the original English version with its Persian dub to examine strategies for translating offensive language as well as the effect of censorship on player experience.

Cultural adaptation is one of the most important current discussions in game localization, as noted by Sajna (2018). He contends that, despite the universal calls for globalization in the video game industry, video game developers are unwilling to create a video game with no cultural references whatsoever. Considering this, the current research holds significance for several key reasons. Firstly, it represents one of the few studies on censorship in Persian audio localized video games and offers novel insights into the role of cultural adaptation in the localization process. The findings will also assist game publishers and developers in understanding the intricacies of localizing video games for the Persian market — including how to deal with offensive language and the censorship laws. Finally, this study contributes to the broader field of audiovisual translation by exploring the ways in which cultural mediation and censorship intersect in the localization of video games.

Given the importance of these issues in shaping the localization process, this study aims to explore how taboo content is adapted in the Persian audio localization of a popular game. To guide this investigation, the following research questions are addressed:

1. How do Iranian localization companies classify and apply translation strategies to censor or render offensive language in a popular English-language video game?

2. How do Iranian localization companies deal with taboo language items in dubbing video games?

In what follows, game localization is examined, with a focus on taboos in video games—particularly within Iran's media landscape—and on strategies employed for translating such content. The adapted methodology is then outlined, followed by findings based on themes from the analyzed game.

2. Literature review

2.1. Game localization

There are approximately 190.6 million Americans playing video games weekly (Pierre-Louis, 2024). Yet, to stay competitive and increase their global market share, developers also need to address diverse consumer needs across the world (Bernal-Merino, 2014). Game localization includes adapting text, audio, visuals, and gameplay to conform to the linguistic, cultural, technical and regulatory norms of each market (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013), while taking into account sensitivity to the preferences of the target audience (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006).

Game localization is not merely a matter of translation; it requires a deep knowledge of the culture to which the game will be presented, and may include changes regarding the names of characters, dialogue and other content to suit local taste (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006). One example is a suicide scene in the Japanese version of Kingdom Hearts II, which was censored for North American audiences to prevent sensitivities toward the visualization of guns (Mandiberg, 2009).

Adapting audio or cinematic assets is also part of the localization process. In full localization, voiceovers are re-recorded in the target language, with subtitles or dubbing integrated to help game players understand the story line (Chandler & Deming, 2011). After recording, audio localization extends to remixing with music and sound effects to preserve cultural sensitivity (Zhou, 2011). User interface (UI) elements such as menus, tutorials, notifications and help messages are also often altered to fulfill cultural expectations (Mandiberg, 2009; Mangiron, 2007; O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013).

Video game localization goes beyond in-game text and audio, to include adapting art assets such as graphics, signs, and logos. These adjustments range from linguistic tweaks (e.g., text in graphics) to regional marketing changes and political compliance (e.g., bans on swastikas in Germany) (Bernal-Merino, 2008). For instance, in the European version of Final Fantasy VIII (1999), a character's swastika-like accessory was redesigned as a Christian cross to avoid offense in countries associating the symbol with Nazism (Di Marco, 2007).

Today, the target culture serves as the central focus of translation assessment, rather than the original text (Chaume, 2020). Certain regions, such as the Middle East, are more accepting of content changes (Chaume, 2020), mainly due to political, moral, religious, and cultural norms that need to be adapted to align with societal values and security requirements (Jarrah et al., 2023; Rahimi & Gupta, 2020; Thawabteh, 2017). Localizing video games for different markets thus requires adapting not only language but also content "to the cultural sensibilities of the target gamers" (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014, p. 13).

The concept of the 'cultural edge' seems extremely pertinent to the topic under discussion, referring to when game content shifts from entertaining to offensive (Edwards, 2006). Edwards (2006) categorizes offensive content within games into 'indiscretions', edgy but generally acceptable (e.g., GTA3, Doom), and 'insults', overtly provocative (e.g., GTA: Hot Coffee, JFK Reloaded). It is noteworthy that controversial sexual content, like the 'Hot Coffee' mod in GTA: San Andreas, spurred public backlash, a re-rating to 'Adults Only', and removal from stores (Cope, 2023; Pearson, 2021). Profanity is especially prevalent in top-selling Shooter and Action-Adventure games (Phan & Tan, 2017). One notable example is GTA: San Andreas, in which taboo terms such as obscenity, profanity, and epithet (Nabila & Nugraha, 2022) enhance characterization and thematic alignment (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014).

Geocultural sensitivities also arise (Edwards, 2006), as seen with historical content, such as Nazi references removed from Return to Castle Wolfenstein (2001) for German audiences (Kay, 2002), or Devotion (2019), which drew fire for artwork critical of China's president (Allen, 2019). Furthermore, religious and cultural themes commonly lead to content changes, like Qur'anic verses in Kakuto Chojin in addition to visual, audio, and packaging changes in conservative regions like the Middle East (Edwards, 2006). In Iran, for example, games are adapted to Islamic guidelines regarding alcohol, language and clothing (Zoraqi & Mousavi, 2024).

With technology advancing, so too did graphic violence in video games (Kline et al., 2003), not to mention concerned parents of young players, leading to the creation of the ESRB in 1994 (Kent, 2010). Such violent games as Death Race and Grand Theft Auto have been criticized (Kocurek, 2015), especially for

their effect on women (Dill & Dill, 1998). Additionally, games have become a place for players to use profanity and slurs as a means to gain attention, provoke, or mock (Habibillah & Sagala, 2022; Ivory et al., 2017), hence the need for censorship to protect younger audiences (Zhang, 2012).

2.2. Taboo terms in Iran's media landscape

Taboos are prohibitions against behaviors causing "anxiety, embarrassment, or shame", and in language, this means certain topics or words are avoided as a "strong politeness constraint" (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 249). Concerns and taboos are varied across different cultures (Bernal-Merino, 2014). Each culture, in deed, has its own distinct sensibilities and, thus, distinct taboo words (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014), and Persian is by no means an exception. For example, in Iranian culture and Persian language, while explicit references to romantic relationships are typically avoided, in Anglophone cultures, among many others, such references are generally accepted.

Persian taboo language is not academically well-recorded, and published sources on the subject are limited (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2018). Arbab (2013) and Sharifi and Darchinian (2009) proposed broad categories of taboos in Persian language and culture. The said articles were based on studies of natural, everyday speech with taboo elements in addition to highlighting these expressions for the Persian language translators, respectively. Yet, scripted content on public media requires a different type of classification as local media normally does not tend to openly depict instances of taboo language due to cultural and religious sensitivities. One of the most relevant classifications of taboo within Persian audiovisual translation belongs to Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021, 2022; Pakar et al., 2020). They highlight the role of censorship in aligning foreign media with Iran's cultural, religious, and political norms. This includes modifying or omitting content conflicting with Islamic beliefs—such as Christian prayers or mentions of Jesus—or with conservative social values, such as relationships outside marriage, sexual innuendos, LGBTQ themes, and even casual terms like 'sweetheart'. Censorship is also politically beneficial for Iran and its allies, ensuring they are depicted in a positive light as negative references to Iran, allies like Russia or Hezbollah are removed, and any positive image of countries such as the U.S. or Israel are softened. Consequently, translators must make swift judgement calls to ensure content aligns with censorship laws (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021, 2022; Pakar et al., 2020). A complete description of the categories is presented in Table 1.

When it comes to the realm of AVT, translators tend to use several strategies to address taboo content. An examination of the foundational literature concerning the subject revealed the strategies utilized by practitioners of audiovisual translation. The findings from the studies illustrate the diverse approaches in various AVT modes for a range of languages: substitution, censorship, and taboo for taboo in Persian subtitling in addition to substitution, censorship, and euphemism in Persian dubbing (Samir, 2023); maintaining, deleting, mitigating, substituting, and amplifying in Persian fansubbing (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2018); direct translation with strong force, direct translation with weak force, deletion, and foreignization in Persian dubbing and subtitling (Ameri & Ghazizadeh, 2014); taboo to taboo, deletion, taboo to non-taboo, and euphemism in Persian dubbing (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2014); euphemism,

omission, and manipulation in Persian dubbing (Sedighi & Najian Tabrizi, 2012); deletion, substitution, mitigation, amplification, compensation, and manipulation in Persian dubbing (Ghazizadeh & Mardani, 2011); neutralization, substitution, and stylistic amplification in English subtitling (Abu-Rayyash & Shiyab, 2023); imitation, transfer, transcription, expansion, and deletion in English localization (Setyawan et al., 2023); omitting, mitigating, and adapting in Arabic localization (Al-Ajarmeh & Al-Adwan, 2022); and translation of the connotative meaning and euphemism in Arabic localization (Mahasneh & Abu Kishek, 2018). For songs, studies showed they were either adapted to fit the Persian language (Khoshsaligheh & Mohammad Alizadeh, 2019; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2022) or kept their original English lyrics (Mohammad Alizadeh et al., 2019).

Iranian censorship began in the 1920s (Farahmand, as cited in Tapper, 2002), and after 1979, the Ministry of Culture started regulating cultural products, including video games (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2016), consistent with Toury's (1995) translation policy. Despite a $7.1 billion gaming market in the Middle East and Africa, where the country is located (Wijman, 2023), and its 32 million gamers (Digital Games Research Center, 2021), sanctions and software piracy continue to limit localization (Šisler, 2013), forcing Iranian gamers to rely on English versions (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2020). Persian dubbing is further complicated by strict censorship and cultural adaptation requirements (Alemzadeh & Khoshsaligheh, 2020). Although Persian localization is under-studied, Sharifi (2016), Jooyaeian and Khoshsaligheh (2022), and Zoraqi and Kafi (2023) provide clues, yet censorship in Persian dubbing should be further researched.

3. Method

3.1. Corpus

The corpus of the research comprised the original scripts of a purposively selected sample of a well-known action-adventure video game produced by the United States, along with its Persian audio localized version. Using a criterion sampling technique (Dornyei, 2007), a video game that would best serve the purpose of the research was chosen based on "some specific predetermined criteria" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 128). This allowed for the selection of the subject to form the corpus needed for the study. Two primary criteria were used in the selection and formation of the corpus: (1) the inclusion of a wide range of taboo items within the original content of the video game, ensuring a diverse analysis of these elements, and (2) the dubbed version chosen for the study must be well-known and widely recognized.

The title was chosen to specifically address the ad-hoc approaches used in a dubbed video game. Eventually, the sample of the study included the title Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (2004) with its dubbed version as the case study. The selection was based on a combination of review ratings, user engagement, and the high number of views on the relevant fan-based websites, such as Magbaazi[1], where

[1]. https://www.magbaazi.ir

the Persian localization conducted by Cyber Persian Games garnered significant attention.[1] The language combination and directionality are from English to Persian. The corpus consists of the action-adventure game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (2004), developed by Rockstar. It was localized in 2006 by Cyber Persian Games, including full dubbing + box and docs, drawing on the game localization levels identified by Khoshsaligheh et al. (2023).

This study examines the Persian audio localization of GTA: San Andreas, which was localized for the Iranian market in terms of both box and docs localization and dubbing (Chandler & Deming, 2011), though in-game text was not translated. For this reason, audio and cinematic assets were chosen for this study because they are directly related to the localization level applied to the game. This choice also reflects Khoshsaligheh et al.'s (2023) 'full dubbing + box and docs' model and is a good instance of partial localization in Iran, where the Persian dubbing continues to be a well-received example even after nearly two decades[2]. Due to the game's complex, word-rich RPG format (Dietz, 2008) and engagement with real-world social issues, such as gang violence (presenting the enmity that existed between the Crips and Bloods), police corruption (Rodney King beating plus the 1992 Los Angeles riots), social inequality, and the crack epidemic, it is positioned closer to realism on Pettini's (2021) realism-fictionalism spectrum. This mix of realism and fiction makes it an effective case for exploring how translation strategies address offensive language in socially relevant content.

Lastly, the choice to focus on the audio and cinematic aspects of the game stems from the localization trends in Persian games. Most older officially localized Persian games were fully dubbed, whereas recent games more frequently belong to the 'box and docs' localization category (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2023). So, since our interest is in the 'translation' of offensive language, an older game that had an officially dubbed version was chosen, because this makes the findings more legitimate and applicable to the current state of localization.

3.2. Data collection procedure

English-language scripts from GameFAQs[3] and GTA Wiki[4], as well as the Persian dubbed transcriptions were drawn upon. The data encompassed cinematic sequences (cutscenes), dialogue in missions, in-game interactions (like phone calls), and any narrative elements not included in pre-existing scripts, all of which were meticulously transcribed. And, for the next step, since no Persian transcripts or subtitles were available, the Persian audio localized version was carefully transcribed, capturing each word. This transcription was then analyzed in the following steps based on definite approaches. The study used a parallel corpus of 5707 words with 611 source–target alignments. The unit of analysis was primarily

[1]. To come up with a complete account of Cyber Persian Games, an old game localization company that is no longer operating, which officially localized the video game into Persian, a fan-based website named oldpersiangames, focusing on introducing and preserving localized video games into Persian, was consulted (https://oldpersiangames.org/games/grand-theft-auto-san-andreas-cyber).
[2]. https://gamotionart.com/interview-with-doubler-cj/
[3]. https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com
[4]. https://gta.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Page

words and phrases; however, entire sentences were also analyzed in instances where the context significantly impacted the meaning or tone of the derogatory language.

3.3. Data analysis

To consistently study the notion of taboo language and identify words or expressions that are considered taboo in the Iranian audiovisual context within a selected British-American audiovisual text, the analysis employed the empirical and locally relevant hybrid categorization of inappropriate language in Iran's audiovisual text introduced by Pakar et al. (2020), Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2021) and Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2022). The hybrid framework has defined the notion of taboo in terms of the Persian audiovisual context. It is used to determine what could be interpreted as taboo content, endangering permission for the release of a dubbed version.

As argued by Pakar and Khoshsaligheh, Persian taboo terms (see Table 1) are a twenty-seven-term framework in the original, presented for the attention of Persian dubbing professionals. These terms are divided into three subdivisions: religious, socio-cultural, and political (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021, 2022; Pakar et al., 2020). Table 1 provides a summary of sub-types to help with data analysis. There are various reasons why this specific typology was chosen: the twenty-seven-term taboo typology by Pakar and Khoshsaligheh is based on a "representative corpus", offering a comprehensive and detailed classification system (Pakar & Khoshsaligheh, 2021). This comprehensiveness guarantees that a broad variety of taboo expressions, with regards to the Persian audiovisual text, are discovered and investigated, which expands the range and accuracy of the study. Moreover, because the typology is especially designed to accommodate Persian taboo terms within Iran's media landscape, it is perfectly appropriate for the cultural and linguistic context of the product under analysis. This cultural specificity is crucial in accurately capturing the nuances and implications of taboo language in Persian. The categories themselves are appropriate for the topic under investigation in this research. It should be mentioned that a PC was selected as the platform for the title.

Table 1. Typology of Persian inappropriate word types

Religious	**Socio-Cultural**	**Political**
Blasphemy	Insults	Negative references to Iran
Swearing using Jesus or God	Ethnic and racial slurs	Negative references to Iran's allies
Non-Islamic references	Foreign music and models	Positive references to America
Negative references to Islam	Non-sexual corruption	References to certain countries
Sexual content	Smoking and narcotics	Political ideologies
LGBTQ references	Marital stability	Reference to Jewish and Communism
Romantic expressions	Imitating unpleasant sounds	

Premarital relationships
Suicide references
Unclean animals
Vocal music
Singing
Dancing
Alcohol

Note: Typology adapted from Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2021, 2022) and Pakar et al. (2020)

In the first step of the analysis, the English-language script of the video game was conceptually reviewed using the hybrid framework's categories to identify and record instances of taboo content. Accordingly, a separate dataset involving taboo items was compiled. Due caution was exercised in identifying terms that are taken to be taboo. For instance, the term ‘nigga’, widely uttered by the black characters in the game, was not included in the analysis since it is “for exclusive black use” and thus not deemed a racial slur when used by black speakers (Dalzell & Victor, 2015, p. 547).

Next, the taboo items in the original transcribed title texts and their target forms were separated based on the corresponding units of meaning (words, phrases, sentences). Subsequently, based on an overall qualitative analysis of taboo items within the verbal-acoustic dimension, each original English segment containing taboo words or expressions was compared and contrasted with its dubbed Persian equivalent. After examining all the recorded pairs of taboo items, the translation strategies used to render the taboo language in the dubbed version were found and classified into 11 primary categories. Then, descriptive statistics were provided for each strategy, including frequency, percentage, and total count.

The typology of dubbing strategies proposed by Ghazizadeh and Mardani (2011) was employed as the primary model for identifying the translation strategies used in the chosen localized product. The dubbing strategies selected for this study were chosen consistently with the characteristics of the type of language, taboos here, and the kind of mode, dubbing, being analyzed. The model suggests a detailed description of the commonly employed strategies for rendering taboos in terms of the Iranian audiovisual context. To ensure an in-depth analysis, five additional strategies were used, based on the taxonomies introduced by Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, 2014) for four strategies (loan, generalization, reformulation, and addition), and by Khoshsaligheh et al. (2018) for one strategy (maintenance), all of which are described in the section below. Additionally, the translation strategies are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. A typology of translation strategies for taboo terms

Deletion	
Substitution	Taboo substitution
	Non-taboo substitution
Amplification	
Mitigation	
Compensation	
Manipulation	
Loan	
Explicitation	Specification
	Generalization
Reformulation	
Addition	
Maintenance	

Note: Typology adapted from Ghazizadeh and Mardani (2011), Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, 2014), and Khoshsaligheh et al. (2018)

The presentation and analysis of the data adopts a clear formatting approach for the sake of clarity. The text italicizes video game dialogue quotes, enclosing them in quotation marks, and underlines taboo items. Quotes in tables are in normal font, and items that are taboo are highlighted with bold. When these items appear alone in the text, they are in inverted commas and normal font. This consistent format enhances readability.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings from a detailed analysis of the translation strategies used by Cyber Persian Games in the Persian dubbing of the British-American video game Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (2004). The strategies explored involve euphemism, deletion, maintenance, neutralization, manipulation, amplification, taboo substitution, reformulation, generalization, addition, and loan. This study analyzed the original English version and the Persian audio localized version to examine how culturally, religiously, and politically sensitive content was adapted to suit the Iranian audience. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was used to understand the modifications, with back translations and tables to illustrate key examples.

4.1.1. Euphemism

As shown in Table 11, euphemism (in Ghazizadeh & Mardani's (2011) taxonomy, mitigation) is the most commonly used strategy, often employed to soften the impact of offensive content, even if it still carries a negative connotation, albeit a weaker one. For instance, the sample corpus includes the segments "*Fuck you, Sweet*." and "*This shit's real fucked up. Everything!*". They were translated into Persian as "*Damn you*. [Back translation]" and "*You've messed everything up*! [Back translation]", respectively. Table 3

illustrates that the dubbed version alleviated certain taboo words like ‘fuck’ and ‘fucked up’ in the mission “Sweet & Kendl”, which were present in the source text.

Table 3. An instance of euphemism in the mission “Sweet & Kendl”

Context: Kendl starts walking away.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
KENDL: **Fuck you**, Sweet.	**لعنت به تو.**	KENDL: **Damn you**.
CJ: **Oh, shit** - here we go again.	اه، **لعنتی**، دوباره شروع شد.	CJ: Oh **damn**, it started again.
SWEET: **This shit’s real fucked up. Everything!**	**گندشو درآوردین. همه چی رو!**	SWEET: **You’ve messed everything up!**

4.1.2. Deletion

Deletion is the second most frequent strategy (see Table 11), utilized to completely remove the offensive content from the dubbed version. The most frequently removed words from the chosen corpus were swear words. It should be noted that cursing is frowned upon in the Persian culture, as it is associated with social and cultural restrictions and is generally avoided in polite conversation (Arbab, 2013).

Ideological manipulation involves changes that are deliberately made to influence the target text based on power, dominance, and ideology (Díaz-Cintas, 2012). For example, derogatory terms such as ‘fuck’, ‘bitch’, and ‘hell’ were omitted, as shown in this example of Table 4, where the phrase “*I love him!*” was entirely removed, without referencing pre-marital relationships, which are not acceptable in the Iranian society.

Table 4. An instance of deletion from the mission “Sweet & Kendl”

Context: Kendl starts walking away.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
KENDL: Look, **I love him!** And what the **fuck** are you?	تو فکر می کنی کی هستی؟	KENDL: Who do you think you are?
SWEET: At least I got principles.	لااقل شخصیت دارم.	SWEET: At least I have character.
KENDL: Oh, and I guess that makes you **an upstanding American**. Carl, tell him!	نه که تو خیلی **آدم حسابی** هستی. کارل، بهش بگو!	KENDL: As if you're such **a decent person**. Carl, tell him!
SWEET: Carl, don't tell me **shit**, **bitch**.	اون **هیچی** نمی تونه بگه.	SWEET: He can't say **anything**.
CJ: **As long as he treats her right. Disrespect you, and he’s dead.**	**اگه باهاش خوب رفتار کنی، چه عیبی داره؟**	CJ: **What harm is there if you treat her well?**

SWEET (to CJ): How the **hell** you gonna say that? Like it's any business of yours.	چطور می تونی این حرفو بزنی؟ اینا به تو ربطی نداره.	SWEET (to CJ): How can you say that? This has nothing to do with you.

However, not all manipulations are ideologically driven (Díaz-Cintas, 2012). Technical manipulation is also used for pragmatic purposes, such as eliminating intensifiers, resulting from a linguistic discrepancy between Persian and English. While Persian does, in fact, use swearing to emphasize or heighten, it does so far less frequently and in more limited situations compared to English (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2018). In the opening movie, the line "*Hell no, Officer Tenpenny*." was rendered as "*No, Officer Tenpenny*. [Back translation]". This is an example of the removal of intensifiers.

Eliminating offensive words is often easier than replacing them, given the complexities of altering game audio in line with the Iranian culture. Nevertheless, this approach has its drawbacks. Story and mechanics are combined to appeal to players and enable them to connect with characters (Toh, 2023). Insults carry characters' emotions and personalities (Pakar et al., 2020), so removing strong language will ruin the character's style and compromise the player's experience.

Considering the low number of profane words used in Iranian films and series, Pakar et al. (2020) argue that the removal or replacement of profanities in Persian dubbings should not be merely considered censorship but rather viewed as a form of domestication strategy (Venuti, 1995). This statement also applies to Iranian video games, as such words are used much less frequently in Iranian games compared to American ones.

4.1.3. Maintenance

In 14.08% of cases, the translators decided to preserve the original taboo content in its direct form in the Persian version. This strategy was used when the meaning of the original dialogue was deemed central to the game's plot or when the impact of the original dialogue should have been, in the translators' judgement, retained. For instance, in some cases, narcotics were directly translated into Persian with the same level of intensity, keeping the game's original integrity intact. Whereas the use of any substances that cause intoxication, such as narcotics like cocaine and heroin, is considered forbidden (haram) as they have adverse effects on the mind, soul, and social conduct, leading individuals away from God, family, and community (Ali, 2014).

Such language must be altered or simply excluded if it is to be presented to the public as a form of dubbing because it teaches "dangerous addictions and earning a living from unsavory means such as smuggling" (Naficy, 2012, p. 190); thus it is in breach of the eighth rule of the Ministry's instructions, and its representation or even its mention in the Iranian public media is controlled and prevented by the Iranian gatekeeping authorities. Enforcement of these rules, however, diverges from official guidelines, following a number of unofficial factors, such as changing censorship officials (Naficy, 2012).

As can be seen in the example in Table 5, the dubbed version follows the original very closely in the Persian rendition. The dubbing is less conservative, yet only in the case of part of a descriptive phrase ("base slave") and a derogatory term, the words 'base' and 'mother-fucker' were deleted or manipulated in the translation.

Table 5. An instance of maintenance from the mission "Cleaning the Hood"

Context: CJ and Ryder walk out of B Dup's front door.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
CJ: I see what you mean now, man. If **crack** can do that to Big Bear, turn him into a **base** slave, **the average mother-fucker** ain't got a chance.	حالا می فهمم منظورت چی بود، مرد. **کراک** چه بلایی سر بیگ بیر آورده، داره نوکری می کنه. برای **اون بدبخت** دیگه هیچ امیدی نیست.	CJ: Now I understand what you meant, man. What trouble has **crack** caused Big Bear that he's serving. There is no hope left for **that poor guy**.
RYDER: Damn **dope fiends** and drug addicts everywhere in this city. Piss me off.	موادی و **کراکی** همه جا تو این شهر ریخته.	RYDER: Drug users and **crack addicts** are everywhere in this city.
CJ: Looks like it's up to us then.	ولی مثل اینکه بستگی به ما داره.	CJ: But it seems that it depends on us.
RYDER: Let's just cruise through the hood and find us **somebody selling**.	بیا تو محل بگردیم و **یه فروشنده** پیدا کنیم.	RYDER: Let's cruise through the neighborhood and find **a seller**.

An example from "Cesar Vialpando" shows that, in the early parts of the mission, a segment involving a taboo related to boys' and girls' relationships in contemporary Iranian socio-cultural context was translated using a strategy that maintained the original taboo. In the original version, the segment, "*Let me guess, Sweet - senseless killing right, but a boyfriend from the Southside, wrong*?" was translated as "*Let me guess, Sweet - killing a donkey is okay but having a boyfriend from the Southside is wrong*?" [back-translation from Persian]. In this segment, taboo language is used regarding the relationship of an unmarried boy and girl, using the Persian term for 'boyfriend'. The Persian translators have kept this taboo, probably since the context depicts a boyfriend (from the Southside) to be inappropriate. It is noteworthy that words such as 'beer', 'girlfriend', or 'boyfriend' are not taboo in English-speaking countries or other regions of the world.

4.1.4. Neutralization

Neutralization (in Ghazizadeh & Mardani's (2011) taxonomy, non-taboo substitution), was employed in 8.84% of the instances (see Table 11), where offensive language was replaced with more neutral or culturally acceptable terms. In an instance of taboo language, the allusion to sexual promiscuity was left out. A taboo word related to sex, "*we're gonna call up some 'hood rats*" was rendered in the dubbed version as "*We want to go out with the guys*" when translated back from Persian to English.

Table 6. Example from the mission "Sweet & Kendl"

Context: The four homies meet at Grove Street.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
SWEET: **Hey, we're gonna call up some 'hood rats** and chill **the hell** out. You want some?	**ما می‌خوایم با بچه ها بریم بیرون** یه دوری بزنیم. توام میای؟	**We want to go out with the guys** and hang out. Are you coming too?

4.1.5. Manipulation

There are numerous instances (41 in total) where the meaning of the original text was manipulated and altered. The following case highlights one of the modified items that changed the original meaning. As demonstrated by the example in Table 7, the segment "*All they do is sell yay and ruin the place*" (referring to selling cocaine) was replaced with "What are you talking about? [Back translation]" in the Persian version, removing the specific reference to drug dealing.

Table 7. An instance of manipulation in the mission "Cleaning the Hood"

Context: Big Smoke, Sweet and Ryder are in Sweet's house.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
BIG SMOKE (to Sweet): Hey, you gotta keep it real, man.	هی، تو باید همه چی رو جدی بگیری، مرد.	BIG SMOKE: Hey, you need to take everything seriously, man.
SWEET: Man, nobody **give a shit** about the 'hood.	هی، هیچکی تو محل براش **مهم نیست.**	SWEET: Hey, nobody **cares** about the neighborhood.
BIG SMOKE: I do!	مهمه!	BIG SMOKE: It's important!
SWEET: **All they do is sell yay and ruin the place**. No **crack** ever made a gang tight.	**چی داری میگی؟** هیچ **عملی** نمی تونه همه چیزو تو باندمون مرتب نگه داره.	SWEET: **What are you talking about?** No **addict** can keep everything in our gang in order.

4.1.6. Amplification

Amplification (5.40%) meant that a non-taboo or mildly inappropriate term from the original English was made more offensive in the Persian version. For example, "Get your hands off me, man" was translated as "*Don't touch me, jerk*", a more aggressive way to speak. This strategy was used to heighten the emotional intensity of certain scenes in the target language in the hope of creating more impact on those scenes.

While betting, like the alcoholic drinks, is banned in the Islamic culture, the collected data also showed that it had not been censored. The following example is an evident case.

As shown in Table 8, in this example, the translation made the concept of betting more explicit.

Table 8. Amplification from the mission "Cesar Vialpando"

Context: CJ enters.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
SWEET: Don't say a word, Carl. Just follow your sister, before you see another dead sibling. Then you'll know exactly what my problem is. She's meeting him at some **cholo car club**.	هیچی نگو، کارل. فقط دنبال خواهرت برو. بعد متوجه میشی من منظورم چیه. قراره اونو تو **باشگاه شرطبندی ماشین** ملاقات کنه.	Don't say anything, Carl. Just follow your sister. You'll understand what I mean later. She is going to meet him at the **car betting club.**

4.1.7. Taboo substitution

Taboo substitution (2.78%) replaced a culturally taboo term from the source language with a similarly offensive term that is more relevant in the target culture. For example, in the case of 'grease-ball' translated into 'filthy', although the ethnic slur retained its offensive connotation, it was adapted in a manner to fit in the Persian culture. This strategy preserved the insult while making it more culturally relevant for the Iranian audience.

4.1.8. Reformulation

Reformulation (2.45%) involved paraphrasing offensive content from the original text, keeping the same impression but in a more culturally acceptable way. For instance, in one mission, the phrase was rephrased from "*you'll think God himself has crapped on you*" to "*you'll think God himself did it*", eliminating the offensive reference to bodily functions but keeping the meaning intact. The translators adopted the strategy to produce a rendition that was less offensive to Persian audiences.

Table 9. Example from the mission "Burning Desire"

Context: CJ enters the doughnut shop. Tenpenny, Pulaski and Hernandez are sat at a table.		
Original Dialogue	**Dubbed Dialogue**	**Back-Translation from Persian**
TENPENNY: Officer Pulaski thinks you're trying to screw with us, Carl. Now you get this straight. We own you. You're ours. We can **shit** on you from such a height **you'll think God himself has crapped on you.** You understand?	سرکار پولسکی فکر می کنه ما رو می پیچونی، کارل. بذار رک بهت بگم. تو مال مایی. ما مالک تو هستیم. ما از ارتفاعی می تونیم روی تو **کثافت کنیم که فکر کنی خود خدا این کارو کرده.**	Officer Pulaski thinks you're trying to screw with us, Carl. Let me be blunt with you. We own you. You're ours. We can **crap** on you from such a height **that you'll think God himself did it.**

4.1.9. Generalization

In generalization (1.47%), specific terms were replaced with more general or broader terms to avoid offending cultural or religious sensitivities. One example is when 'beer' was generalized to "drink"

because alcohol mentions are deemed taboo in Iranian society. Likewise, in the third case from Table 4, a reference to a national identity was avoided by generalizing 'an upstanding American' to "a decent person", so as to be free of associations with a political kind.

Table 10. Example from the mission "Tagging Up Turf"

Original Dialogue	Dubbed Dialogue	Back-Translation from Persian
Here, get yourself a **beer** or something.	یه **نوشیدنی** بخور.	Have a **drink**.

4.1.10. Addition

Addition (1.15%) (See Table 11) refers to the situation where the translator included additional words or phrases to either seem culturally appropriate or emotionally intense. One example of this is the original phrase "*Go fuck yourself, you just they bitch.*" rendered as "*Get lost, mess with yourself. You are their donkey*", adding more phrases to adjust the meaning and depth in Persian. The preservation of the original context in addition to the new cultural appropriateness of the content were possible with this strategy.

4.1.11. Loan

Table 11 shows that loan (0.98%) was the least used strategy. The technique involved directly borrowing taboo words from the source language and employing them in the target language without any modification. For instance, the term 'beer' was kept as 'beer' in Persian, possibly due to its pronunciation (to create a stronger image of the character Big Bear in the player's mind) or the translators' intent to retain some of the cultural flavor of the original game. However, this strategy was seldom used because of the high sensitivity of such terms in Iranian society.

4.2. Expressing or suppressing taboo content?

A total of 611 cases of inappropriate content were identified and classified into 11 different strategies according to their use. Table 11 shows that euphemism was the most frequently used strategy (34.06%), followed by deletion (22.09%). Maintenance (14.08%), neutralization (8.84%), and manipulating the original content (6.71%) were also common strategies. Amplification (5.40%), taboo substitution (2.78%), reformulation (2.45%), generalization (1.47%), addition (1.15%), and loan (0.98%) were less often employed.

Table 11. Frequency of each strategy for rendering inappropriate content in the game

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Euphemism	208	34.06
Deletion	135	22.09
Maintenance	86	14.08
Neutralization	54	8.84

Manipulation	41	6.71
Amplification	33	5.40
Taboo Substitution	17	2.78
Reformulation	15	2.45
Generalization	9	1.47
Addition	7	1.15
Loan	6	0.98
Total	611	100

Figure 1 shows the distribution of these strategies in the dataset.

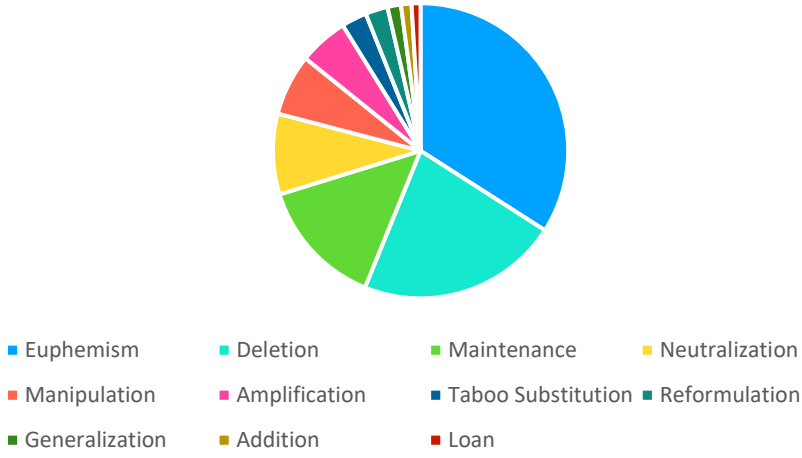

Figure 1. Percentages of strategies for rendering inappropriate content in the entire corpus

The findings overall revealed that the Persian localization company tended to tone down the force and effect of the original taboo language—segments recognized as inappropriate by the criteria of the Iranian audience. Importantly, the official audiovisual translation (AVT) tradition in Iran, especially dubbing, follows a similar pattern as shown by earlier studies (Ghazizadeh & Mardani, 2011; Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2014, 2016; Sedighi & Najian Tabrizi, 2012). In this pattern, the language in the original material is often severely altered by deleting, neutralizing, or at least mitigating certain elements.

5. Discussion

This study examined how an official Iranian game localization agency addressed offensive language in the Persian audio localized version of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, in view of Iran's cultural sensitivities and strict rules of media. It focused on the strategies translators used to deal with taboo language in Persian audio localization, identifying euphemism and deletion as the most common methods, reflecting a preference for softening or omitting offensive language to meet cultural standards.

According to the studies of corpuses of official dubbing in the Iranian mainstream media, there was evidence to conclude that the formal process of dubbing tended to suppress the main cultural features of

the original content, taboo terms in this case, in their Persian rendition since certain groups of agents "are likely to ideologically intervene in, and exercise appropriations on, the translated products" (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2016, p. 238). It came as no surprise then that the official dubbing respected the accepted norms of the local community, as seen in other empirical studies (e.g. Ameri & Ghazizadeh, 2014; Ghazizadeh & Mardani, 2011; Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2014).

While specific strategies for censoring or rendering offensive language in video games are not detailed in the available sources, the findings suggested that game localization in Iran bears a close resemblance to that of the Arabic scene; Al-Ajarmeh and Al-Adwan (2022) and Mahasneh and Abu Kishek (2018) found that the Arab localizers chose a modified and censored version of the original, similar to the accepted authorized translation practices, suggesting that the priority of the Arab localizers was also the strategies of euphemism and omission, particularly for translating religious and offensive items to distance the notion of Paganism from the original content. This also aligns with the results of a paper by Jarrah et al. (2023), who revealed that Arab localizers "tried to adapt the text to suit the target-language culture as much as possible" (Jarrah et al., 2023, p. 12). It can be clearly concluded that akin to the Arabic context, Persian localization agencies favor a target-oriented approach and thus a more acceptable rendition in terms of Toury's (1995) initial norms. Practically, this approach broadens the game's accessibility, particularly for younger players, by preserving storyline elements in a culturally suitable form that avoids promoting inappropriate language. This aligns with Zhang's (2012) perspective, which suggests that censorship is sometimes necessary to shield younger audiences from harmful content.

The few existing studies on game localization, such as those by Setyawan et al. (2023), who observed that the localizers selected the negotiation strategy over the resistance for translating cultural terms from Indonesian into English, and Sharifi (2016), who found that localizers opted for a more acceptable rather than adequate translation in localization from Persian to English, also suggest that localizers prioritize making the localized product commercially viable for international players.

The study also revealed that Cyber Persian Games would often leave some items, such as the soundtrack, untranslated to preserve original nuances and avoid cultural mismatches. This is in marked contrast to previous work on translating songs and music, which often necessitates significant changes in content due to issues such as singability and cultural relevance (Khoshsaligheh & Mohammad Alizadeh, 2019; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2022; Mohammad Alizadeh et al., 2019).

Undoubtedly, the Iranian localization company suppressed offensive language by means of euphemism, deletion, or neutralization to reflect cultural sensitivities and media regulation practices. These approaches also correspond to state-controlled standards for audiovisual content, as observed by Alemzadeh and Khoshsaligheh (2020). Moreover, the frequent use of euphemism and deletion as a means to deal with offensive language suggested the priority of the Iranian dubbing industry was cultural conformity over a faithful rendering of the original material. This is consistent with Chaume's (2020) view that audiovisual translation tends to adapt content to the target culture rather than sticking to literal translations.

The Persian audio localized version of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas did not engender any public or regulatory backlash in Iran due to the removal or softening of offensive language, which also aligns well with domestication strategies described by Venuti (1995). Additionally, the growing popularity of the audio localized version despite heavy censorship supports Chaume's (2020) argument that audiences in certain regions like the Middle East, where Iran is located, will tolerate linguistic censorship in audiovisual media provided the content is adapted to the cultural and regulatory norms of the target society.

6. Conclusion

This research contributes to the broader field of audiovisual translation by offering fresh perspectives into how offensive language is localized in video games, particularly in a conservative culture such as that of Iran. It fills a gap in AVT literature, which has tended to focus primarily on film and television, by identifying 11 translation strategies that are also consistent with other forms of audiovisual media, but are especially tailored to the interactive constraints of gaming.

Nevertheless, the limitations of the study are significant and should be carefully considered. Due to the dearth of prior research on censorship in audio localization of video games, the development of a theoretical framework was fraught with difficulty and thus was limited in scope. Additionally, the research merely explores one video game and may not generalize easily to other games or genres. Lastly, the findings are exploratory rather than confirmatory, in that they do not provide insights regarding the audience perspective on censorship.

Further research is required into audience reception and how strategies such as euphemism and deletion can determine player immersion and perception. Future studies could also benefit from comparative analyses across different cultural contexts with similar censorship practices, such as the Arab world (Al-Ajarmeh & Al-Adwan, 2022; Mahasneh & Abu Kishek, 2018) or China (Zhang, 2012), ultimately advancing our understanding of cross-cultural localization. This study's framework could be expanded by such studies, which could provide valuable insights for AVT professionals working in censored environments, considering ethical and practical aspects.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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About the authors

Parisa Fouladi holds a graduate degree in Translation Studies from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Her research focuses on cultural adaptation in multimedia localization and digital translation.

Mohammad Reza Hashemi is a Professor in Translation Studies at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. His research focuses on translation, culture, and discourse analysis.

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From Page to Screen: How Media Adaptations Reframe Classic Literature for Contemporary Audiences

Diya Abraham[1]

Christ University, India

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Abstract

This study investigates how classic literature is transformed into modern media adaptations, exploring the interplay between traditional texts and contemporary cultural landscapes. By examining adaptations across various media forms, including film, television, and digital platforms, this study evaluates how these reinterpretations respond to and reflect modern societal values, norms, and technological advancements. Through a detailed analysis of selected case studies, this study employed cultural and intertextual frameworks to assess the narrative, thematic, and stylistic shifts that resonate with diverse audiences. Examples such as Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996), Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013) highlight the dynamic ways in which media adaptations serve as cultural artifacts, bridging historical literature and contemporary dialogue. Additionally, this study discusses the evolving role of digital technologies, such as streaming platforms and immersive formats, in reshaping the accessibility and impact of literary works.

Keywords

adaptation, cultural intertextuality, digital media, literary transformation, narrative reinterpretation

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[1] https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2283-2985 | ✉ diyasusan.abraham@baceh.christuniversity.in

* Christ University, Bengaluru, India

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1. Introduction

The transformation of classic literature into visual media is one of the most dynamic developments in contemporary culture. Once characterized by quiet, solitary reading, these timeless narratives now reach mass audiences through film and television, reshaping to align with modern sensibilities. Adaptations act as cultural bridges, reimagining literary works that resonate with the values and concerns of today's society. However, this process extends beyond simple translation and involves creative reinterpretation, offering fresh contexts that often diverge from the original. This shift raises important questions about fidelity to the source material, the role of intertextuality, and the evolving relationship between audience reception and cultural ideologies. In an era dominated by visual media and digital technologies, these adaptations challenged traditional notions of authorship and authenticity. Streaming platforms and social media have further democratized access, bringing classic narratives to diverse audiences.

From a cultural studies perspective, adaptations are not merely artistic endeavors, but cultural products that reflect and shape societal values and ideologies. Rooted in the work of Hall (1973) and Williams (1978), this approach views adaptations as sites of cultural negotiation where power structures, norms, and ideologies are both contested and reaffirmed. For instance, Hulu (2017) *The Handmaid's Tale* reframes Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel to address contemporary issues such as gender and reproductive rights in the context of movements, such as #MeToo. Similarly, adaptations of Dickens' (1998) *Great Expectations* critique modern economic inequality and social stratification, paralleling the original novel's critique of Victorian class structures. These examples highlight how adaptations engage with modern social concerns, while drawing on classic literature as a framework for exploring contemporary issues.

One of the most significant ways adaptations reframe classic literature is through the lens of 1990s cultural and social dynamics. For example, many modern adaptations of Shakespeare's works reinterpret the themes of power, identity, and morality to address current issues such as mental health, race relations, and gender dynamics. Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo and Juliet* maintain the original Shakespearean language but place the narrative in a hyper-modern, visually striking world that appeals to younger generations while preserving the core of the tragedy.

Similarly, recent adaptations of Jane Austen's novels have become platforms for addressing modern concerns regarding women's autonomy and agency. The 2020 film adaptation of *Emma* highlights its heroine's navigation of class dynamics and personal growth with an eye towards feminist interpretations, making the story not only a romantic comedy, but also a critique of the societal expectations of women. These adaptations do more than replicate the source material; they invite contemporary audiences to engage with the text in new ways, allowing the stories to resonate across generations and sociopolitical landscapes.

In other instances, adaptations may subvert the source material and directly challenge its themes or values. For example, *The Handmaid's Tale*, originally written by Margaret Atwood in 1985, was adapted into a

Hulu series in 2017. In the *Journal of Political Sociology*, a study titled *Reading Media Culture Politically: The Case of a Handmaid's Tale* (2023) examines how the series articulates key socio-political events and relations, resonating with the history of social struggles and the political contexts of its period. By emphasizing these themes, the adaptation transforms the narrative into a pointed critique of modern-day issues, even though the original text was rooted in concerns since the 1980s.

Against this backdrop, by examining the reinterpretation of the texts in the 21st-century media landscape, this research explores how adaptations respond to and reflect cultural, social, and technological shifts. It argues that adaptations are not merely derivative works, but cultural artifacts that engage with ongoing dialogues about identity, values, and changes in a rapidly evolving world.

2. Literature review

For many years, scholars and audiences alike have been fascinated with the relationship between literature and film, especially the concept of adaptation (Oza, 2024). The whole process of transforming written texts into visual media raises questions that are very crucial in terms of artistic integrity, cultural relevance, and creativity while retelling great histories. Adaptation theory has grappled with these issues for decades, evolving from early concerns about fidelity to more complex understandings of how literature and film interact (Johnson, 2017). This literature review explores the scholarly debates surrounding media adaptations of classic literature, tracing the shift from a fidelity-based critique to a more nuanced, creative, and culturally aware analysis of adaptation. By examining key theories and case studies, this review provides a comprehensive overview of the field, highlighting how adaptations reflect and challenge contemporary social and cultural values.

2.1. Early theories of adaptation: Fidelity criticism

One of the earliest frameworks for understanding film adaptations of literature is the concept of fidelity, which emphasizes the degree to which an adaptation remains faithful to its source material. Proponents of fidelity theory argue that a successful adaptation must adhere closely to the original text's characters, plot and themes. This has been the majority discourse regarding adaptation throughout much of early discussion on adaptation, especially in the mid-20th century where most book classics adapted into film are deemed to have deviated much from the meant intention of the original work. Critics viewed adaptations as potentially "vulgar" or "inferior" versions of literature, with film seen as a less serious art form compared to the written word (Leitch, 2003). Fidelity criticism has been most notably explored by early scholars like Bluestone (1957), who, in his seminal work *Novels into Film*, asserted that the medium of film is inherently limited in its ability to capture the complexity of literature. Bluestone's analysis hinged on the notion that the written word allows for introspection, subtlety, and depth, whereas film, as a visual and temporal medium, is more focused on action and spectacle. Adaptations necessarily involve a mutation of the original text, with something always lost in the translation from page to screen (Bluestone, 1957).

However, critics of fidelity theory have pointed out that this framework is overly rigid and reductive, assuming that the goal of an adaptation is to replicate the original work as faithfully as possible. Such an approach, they argue, overlooks the creative potential of adaptation as a distinct art form. Scholars such as McFarlane (1996) and Stam (2000) have criticized fidelity discourse for its inherent bias towards literature, which positions the original text as superior and the film as merely derivative. This hierarchical view, they argue, fails to appreciate how adaptations can bring new life to classic works, making them accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences.

2.2. The shift from fidelity to creativity

As adaptation studies developed, scholars began to move away from fidelity as the primary criterion for evaluating adaptations. In the late 20th century, critics increasingly recognized that adaptations should be judged not by how closely they mimic their source material, but by how effectively they engage with it as a creative process. This shift was part of a broader trend in literary and film studies that emphasized intertextuality, interpretation, and the role of the audience in shaping meaning.

Hutcheon's (2006, p. 7) concept of adaptation as "repetition without replication" has been important in reshaping adaptation theory. Hutcheon argues that adaptations should be seen as new works in their own right, rather than mere copies of the original. She emphasizes that each adaptation involves a process of interpretation, in which the adapter must make decisions about how to reframe the source material for a new context and audience. This process inevitably involves both transformation and innovation, as the adapter brings their perspective to bear on the text.

In this view, the fidelity question becomes less important than the broader issue of how adaptations negotiate between the original text and contemporary cultural values. Hutcheon's focus on intertextuality—where texts exist in a dynamic relationship with one another—encourages a more subtle understanding of how adaptations draw on, reference, and reimagine their source material. Petley (2008) echoes this sentiment, describing adaptation as a form of cultural production that is shaped by the interplay between the text, the adapter, and the audience. This perspective shifts the emphasis away from a strict comparison between the book and the film, instead recognizing the adaptation as a dialogue between the past and the present.

2.3. Intertextuality and adaptation: Texts in dialogue

The theory of intertextuality has become central to contemporary adaptation studies, providing a framework for understanding how adaptations engage with their source material and with other cultural texts. Kristeva's (1986) notion of intertextuality suggests that all texts are part of a larger web of meaning, constantly interacting with one another. From this perspective, adaptations are not isolated works, but part of an ongoing conversation between texts and cultures.

In the context of adaptation, intertextuality allows for a richer exploration of how classic literary works are reinterpreted for modern audiences. Rather than simply transferring the plot and characters from book to screen, adaptations often allude to other works, genres, or cultural references, creating a complex tapestry of meanings. For example, Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo & Juliet* draws on both the original Shakespearean text and contemporary pop culture, using modern settings, costumes, and music to recontextualize the story for a 1990s audience. The film becomes a layered intertextual work that speaks both to Shakespeare's original audience and modern viewers, blending the timeless themes of love and conflict with a distinctly postmodern aesthetic.

Similarly, Ang Lee's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) incorporates elements of 20th-century feminism into Jane Austen's 19th-century novel. By emphasizing the constraints faced by women in Austen's time, the film engages in an intertextual dialogue with contemporary feminist discourse, offering new insights into Austen's characters while remaining true to the spirit of the original work. These adaptations highlight the potential for intertextuality to enrich our understanding of both the source text and the adaptation, creating a space where different cultural moments and perspectives can coexist.

2.4. Reception theory: The role of the audience

While early adaptation theory focused primarily on the relationship between the source text and the film, more recent scholarship has shifted attention to the role of the audience in interpreting adaptations. Reception theory, as developed by scholars like Jauss and Benzinger (1970) and Hall (1973), emphasizes that the meaning of a text is not fixed but is shaped by the audience's cultural, social, and personal context. In the realm of adaptation, this means that how viewers engage with a film adaptation depends on their familiarity with the source material, their cultural background, and their interpretive strategies. This has opened avenues for more recent scholarly endeavors into how audience with limited hearing interact with subtitled media in terms of content comprehension (Shokoohmand & Khoshsaligheh, 2024). In terms of interactive media (that is, video games), how audience's understanding of game world references is mediated by translators and audiences' knowledge resources has been subject to discussion (Zoraqi & Kafi, 2023).

Reception theory has been particularly useful for understanding how adaptations of classic literature resonate with modern audiences. For example, the success of Davies' (1995) *Pride and Prejudice* can be partly attributed to its ability to speak to the cultural concerns of its 1990s audience, particularly regarding gender roles and romantic relationships. Viewers in the 1990s may have interpreted Elizabeth Bennet's independent spirit and resistance to social conventions as aligning with contemporary feminist values, even though Austen's original novel was written in a very different cultural context. Similarly, adaptations of Shakespeare often draw on modern political or social concerns to make the plays more relevant to today's audiences, as seen in adaptations like *Coriolanus* (2011), which frames the play's themes of war and leadership in terms of modern political struggles.

The application of reception theory to adaptation studies also encourages us to think about how different audiences may engage with the same adaptation in different ways. For instance, a viewer who has read the source material may have a different experience of the adaptation than someone who is encountering the story for the first time through the film. This variability in audience reception highlights the complex interplay between text, film, and viewer, emphasizing that the meaning of an adaptation is always open to interpretation and reinterpretation.

2.5. The role of digital technologies in adaptations

The rise of digital technology has also profoundly influenced the adaptation process, transforming how audiences engage with classic literature and its cinematic retellings. Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime have democratized access to adaptations, allowing audiences worldwide to engage with these stories on their own terms. The accessibility of these platforms has broadened the potential reach of adaptations, making it easier for diverse audiences to discover and engage with classic literature in ways that might have been impossible a generation ago.

Moreover, the digital era allows for more innovative forms of storytelling. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) adaptations, though still in their infancy, have the potential to immerse viewers in literary worlds in unprecedented ways. For instance, an adaptation of *Moby-Dick* in VR could place viewers aboard the Pequod, experiencing the novel's themes of obsession and revenge in a fully interactive environment. Similarly, transmedia storytelling—where narratives are told across multiple platforms—offers new possibilities for expanding classic literature into interactive and participatory formats.

However, the digital transformation of literature into media also brings challenges. While adaptations can make classic literature more accessible, there is a concern that the visual format may encourage passive consumption, diminishing the critical engagement that reading requires. As a result, some fear that the complexity of the original works may be lost in translation, especially as adaptations increasingly cater to the short attention spans of today's viewers.

While these adaptations may deviate from the source material in significant ways, they also offer new insights into the original texts, highlighting their continued relevance in a rapidly changing world. By examining these adaptations, we can gain a deeper understanding of how media transformations engage with and reshape classic narratives for contemporary audiences, ensuring that these timeless stories continue to resonate across generations.

3. Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing upon a range of scholarly sources to analyze how modern media adaptations of classic literature reflect or challenge contemporary social and cultural values. The study focuses on adaptations across different media forms, including television, film, and

digital platforms. Key examples include *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), which examines 19th-century gender roles through the lens of late 20th-century audiences. Film adaptations such as Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013) adapt F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel to critique materialism and decadence in contemporary contexts. Each adaptation is analyzed in terms of its production year, medium, and socio-cultural context, drawing on scholarly articles, critical reviews, and audience reception studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of adaptations.

4. Results

The process of adapting classic literature to film or television provides a unique lens through which we can examine how media transformations reframe and reinterpret original texts for contemporary audiences. Media adaptations not only bring literature to life in new and exciting ways, but they also reflect the cultural, political, and social contexts in which they are produced. This section explores several case studies, focusing on how adaptations of classic literature navigate the tension between fidelity to the source material and the need to make stories relevant and engaging for modern viewers. By analyzing specific adaptations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, this section highlights the strategies used by filmmakers to reinterpret timeless narratives for today's audiences.

4.1. Case study 1: Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo & Juliet*

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) has been adapted for the screen numerous times, but few versions have generated as much critical attention as Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film *Romeo & Juliet*. Set in a modern urban environment while retaining Shakespeare's original dialogue, the film is an excellent example of how media adaptations can reframe classic literature to engage contemporary audiences through innovative visual and stylistic choices.

4.1.1. Reframing the narrative

In adapting Shakespeare's 16th-century play, Luhrmann retains the original text's dialogue but dramatically alters the setting, placing the story in a modern, gang-ridden Verona Beach. The feuding families, the Capulets and the Montagues are reimagined as warring corporate dynasties, and the conflict between them plays out in a hyper-violent, media-saturated world. This reframing allows Luhrmann to explore themes of violence, media spectacle, and urban decay, all while maintaining the essence of Shakespeare's original narrative about love and conflict.

By transporting the story to a contemporary setting, Luhrmann makes *Romeo and Juliet* more accessible to a younger, modern audience. The film uses familiar visual and cultural signifiers, such as guns replacing swords and modern costumes, to help viewers connect with the story. The use of contemporary music, including popular artists like Radiohead, further bridges the gap between Shakespeare's world and

that of the late 20th century, highlighting the timeless nature of the themes of love, hatred, and family loyalty.

4.1.2. Intertextuality and modern pop culture

One of the key features of Luhrmann's adaptation is its use of intertextuality, where the film draws on both the Shakespearean source text and modern pop culture references to create a layered viewing experience. Luhrmann blends Shakespearean drama with a postmodern aesthetic, incorporating rapid editing, vibrant colors, and dramatic cinematography to reflect the chaotic energy of the contemporary world. Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo + Juliet* infuses modern pop culture through corporate branding, gun reimaginations as swords, an MTV-style aesthetic, a 1990s pop soundtrack, sensationalist media portrayals, and contemporary costuming, creating a richly intertextual experience.

The film's intertextual approach allows it to function both as a faithful adaptation of Shakespeare's play and as a critique of 1990s consumer culture. By juxtaposing the poetic language of Shakespeare with the frenetic visual style characteristic of 1990s cinema, Luhrmann invites the audience to reflect on how media during that era shaped and distorted our understanding of reality. The use of modern pop culture elements, rooted in the 1990s context, not only brings Shakespeare's themes into a contemporary framework but also underscores how the media spectacle of the time influenced public perceptions of love, fame, and violence.

4.1.3. Impact on audience reception

Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo & Juliet* was a critical and commercial success, particularly among younger viewers who may not have been familiar with Shakespeare's original play. The film's bold stylistic choices and modern setting made it accessible and relatable, offering a new way for contemporary audiences to engage with a classic text. However, some critics argued that the film's emphasis on style over substance detracted from the emotional depth of Shakespeare's work. Despite these criticisms, the adaptation demonstrated the power of media to reframe classic literature for new generations, sparking renewed interest in Shakespearean drama among young people.

4.2. Case study 2: Wright's (2005) *Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) is one of the most beloved novels in English literature, and its numerous adaptations reflect its enduring popularity. Joe Wright's 2005 film adaptation, starring Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet and Matthew Macfadyen as Mr. Darcy, is notable for its fresh and visually stunning approach to Austen's classic story. By blending traditional elements of period drama with a more modern sensibility, Wright's adaptation successfully reframes "Pride and Prejudice" for contemporary audiences.

4.2.1. Visual aesthetics and romanticism

One of the most striking features of Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* is its emphasis on visual beauty and romanticism. Unlike earlier adaptations, such as the 1995 BBC miniseries, which focused on historical accuracy and detailed character development, Wright's film takes a more cinematic approach, using sweeping landscapes, lush cinematography, and evocative music to create a romantic atmosphere. The film's visual aesthetic places a greater emphasis on the emotional and sensory experiences of the characters, particularly Elizabeth and Darcy, whose love story is central to the narrative.

The film's use of natural lighting, long tracking shots, and picturesque rural settings reflects a more modern approach to period drama, emphasizing the characters' connection to the natural world and their emotional journey. This romanticized portrayal of the English countryside serves to heighten the sense of passion and longing between Elizabeth and Darcy, making their relationship more immediate and visceral for contemporary viewers. By focusing on the emotional intensity of the characters' interactions, Wright's adaptation creates a sense of intimacy and realism that resonates with modern audiences, who may be more accustomed to visually-driven storytelling.

4.2.2. Characterization and modern sensibilities

In addition to its visual style, Wright's (2005) *Pride and Prejudice* reinterprets the novel's characters in ways that reflect modern sensibilities. Elizabeth Bennet, for example, is portrayed as a more headstrong and independent woman than in previous adaptations, embodying the feminist ideals of the 21st century. Keira Knightley's portrayal of Elizabeth emphasizes her wit, intelligence, and refusal to conform to societal expectations, making her a more relatable and empowered heroine for contemporary viewers.

Similarly, Matthew Macfadyen's Mr. Darcy is depicted as more vulnerable and emotionally open than the aloof, distant figure seen in earlier adaptations. This reinterpretation of Darcy as a complex, emotionally conflicted character aligns with modern expectations of romantic leads, who are often portrayed as more emotionally accessible and human. Wright's focus on the emotional development of both characters helps to create a more nuanced and relatable love story that resonates with modern audiences, particularly those who value emotional authenticity and equality in romantic relationships.

4.2.3. Cultural context and reception

Wright's adaptation was well-received by both critics and audiences, with many praising its fresh take on Austen's classic novel. The film's modern sensibility, combined with its attention to period detail, allowed it to appeal to both Austen purists and new viewers who may not have been familiar with the original text. By blending traditional elements of period drama with a more cinematic and emotionally driven approach, Wright successfully reframed *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) for contemporary audiences, ensuring its continued relevance in the 21st century.

4.3. Case study 3: Luhrmann's (2013) *The Great Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1925) *The Great Gatsby* has been adapted multiple times for the screen, but none have garnered as much attention or controversy as Luhrmann's 2013 adaptation. Known for its visually opulent style, Luhrmann's (2013) *The Great Gatsby* reimagines Fitzgerald's Jazz Age classic as a lavish spectacle, using modern technology and music to create a heightened, almost surreal portrayal of 1920s America. This adaptation raises important questions about how media transformations can enhance, distort, or overshadow the themes and messages of classic literature.

4.3.1. Visual excess and spectacle

Luhrmann's (2013) *The Great Gatsby* is defined by its visual excess, with opulent party scenes, dazzling special effects, and a bold color palette that reflects the decadence and materialism of the Jazz Age. The film's visual style is both a reflection of the excesses of the Roaring Twenties and a commentary on how consumerism and spectacle continue to dominate modern society. By using 3D technology and CGI effects, Luhrmann creates a hyper-realistic version of Gatsby's world, where every detail is amplified to extravagance.

This visual excess, however, has sparked debate among critics. Supporters, such as those writing for *The Hollywood Reporter*, argue that Baz Luhrmann's flamboyant style effectively captures the excess and spectacle central to Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream. Conversely, critics from publications like *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* have expressed concerns that the film prioritizes visual spectacle over the novel's more nuanced themes of disillusionment and moral decay, with some labelling it as overly superficial in its treatment of the source material. The use of modern music, including songs by artists like Jay-Z and Beyoncé, further adds to the sense of spectacle, creating a jarring contrast between the 1920s setting and the contemporary soundtrack.

4.3.2. Reframing the American Dream

One of the central themes is the critique of the American Dream, and Luhrmann's adaptation takes this theme to new heights by emphasizing the materialism and superficiality of Gatsby's world. The film portrays Gatsby's lavish lifestyle as both seductive and hollow, reflecting the emptiness at the heart of the American Dream. In this sense, Luhrmann's adaptation remains faithful to the novel's central message, but it does so in a way that is tailored to a modern audience accustomed to visual spectacle and excess.

The use of modern music and technology also serves to reframe the story for a contemporary audience, drawing parallels between the excesses of the 1920s and the consumer culture of the 21st century. By emphasizing the similarities between these two eras, Luhrmann's adaptation highlights the enduring relevance of Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream, making the story more accessible to viewers who may not be familiar with the historical context of the novel.

4.3.3. Cultural reception and legacy

Luhrmann's (2013) *The Great Gatsby* received mixed reviews, with critics divided over its visual style and emotional depth. Some praised its bold aesthetics; for instance, *The Guardian* noted Luhrmann's energetic, glittering adaptation of Fitzgerald's novel. Conversely, others criticized the film for sacrificing the original's subtlety in favour of spectacle, with *The Guardian* remarking that it sacrifices all of the original's subtlety in the process. However, the film's commercial success demonstrated its appeal to a wide audience, particularly younger viewers who may not have been familiar with Fitzgerald's novel. The adaptation's use of modern music and technology helped to bridge the gap between the 1920s and the present day, making Gatsby's story of ambition, love, and loss resonate with a new generation of viewers.

These case studies demonstrate the various strategies that filmmakers use to adapt classic literature for the screen, from modernizing settings and characters to employing visual and stylistic techniques that appeal to contemporary audiences. Whether through the use of intertextuality, as seen in *Romeo & Juliet*, the emphasis on emotional authenticity in *Pride and Prejudice*, or the spectacle-driven approach of *The Great Gatsby* (2013), media adaptations have the power to reframe classic literature in ways that reflect the values, concerns, and aesthetics of the present day.

5. Discussion

The process of adapting classic literature into film or television involves nuanced decisions about narrative structure, visual style, and thematic emphasis. These adaptations bring iconic works to new audiences while reshaping them to fit the social, cultural, and technological contexts of their time. This discussion adopts a cultural and intertextual analysis approach, examining how adaptations balance fidelity to the original text with the need to reinterpret it for contemporary audiences. By focusing on specific examples, this analysis explores how media adaptations reframe classic literature for modern viewers, emphasizing the tension between preserving the essence of the original work and adapting it for new cultural landscapes.

A key issue in adaptation studies is fidelity, often debated in terms of how closely an adaptation should adhere to its source material. Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation (Hutcheon, 2013), which sees the process as inherently transformative, frames this analysis. Adaptations must reconcile the limitations of one medium with the affordances of another, leading to reinterpretations that diverge from strict textual fidelity.

For example, Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo + Juliet* retains Shakespeare's original dialogue but reimagines the setting as a modern urban landscape, complete with stylized gang violence and media sensationalism. Memorable scenes, such as the dramatic opening shootout at a gas station, highlight the rivalry between the Montagues and Capulets in a visually dynamic and contemporary way. Similarly, the iconic fish tank scene, where Romeo and Juliet first lock eyes, uses vivid imagery and modern set design to convey their

instant connection while maintaining the poetic dialogue of the original text. This approach combines fidelity to Shakespeare's language with innovation in visual and cultural contexts, illustrating how adaptations can bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary storytelling.

Similarly, Wright's (2005) *Pride and Prejudice* emphasizes emotional intimacy through its romantic cinematography and character-driven performances. For instance, the scene in the rain where Mr. Darcy confesses his love to Elizabeth Bennet is infused with raw emotion, enhanced by the close-up shots and dramatic weather. Another striking moment is the sunrise scene at the end, where Elizabeth and Darcy reconcile in a visually breathtaking sequence that underscores their emotional growth. These cinematic choices diverge from the text's more formal narrative tone but align with contemporary preferences for personal authenticity.

This section uses a cultural contextual lens to analyze how adaptations reflect and respond to the sociocultural norms of their production era. Adaptations inevitably interpret classic literature through the values and concerns of their time, making the works resonate with contemporary audiences.

Wright's (2005) *Pride and Prejudice* reframes Elizabeth Bennet as an assertive and independent woman, aligning her character with 21st-century feminist ideals. This modern emphasis on agency and emotional authenticity speaks to contemporary discourses on gender equality. Similarly, Luhrmann's (2013) *The Great Gatsby* critiques consumer culture by drawing parallels between the excess of the Roaring Twenties and the materialism of the early 21st century. The inclusion of a modern hip-hop soundtrack alongside 1920s jazz reinforces this connection, demonstrating how cultural context shapes the thematic focus of adaptations.

Adopting a media-specific analysis, this section explores how visual and stylistic choices reframe classic literature. The shift from text to screen enables filmmakers to use cinematography, music, and performance to evoke emotions and themes that transcend the source material.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), natural lighting, sweeping landscapes, and intimate close-ups create a romantic atmosphere that enhances the story's emotional resonance, contrasting with the more restrained visual style of earlier adaptations like the 1995 BBC miniseries. Meanwhile, Luhrmann's (2013) *The Great Gatsby* employs vibrant color palettes, 3D technology, and elaborate party scenes to convey the decadence of Gatsby's world, critiquing the spectacle and materialism that parallels contemporary consumer culture.

Using a reader-response approach, this section examines how adaptations engage diverse audiences. By translating classic literature into a visual medium, adaptations make these works more accessible, particularly for younger viewers.

Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo + Juliet* introduced many young audiences to Shakespeare by blending original dialogue with a fast-paced, MTV-inspired aesthetic. Similarly, Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) attracted viewers unfamiliar with Austen's work through its emotionally charged performances

and visually stunning portrayal of the English countryside. These adaptations serve as entry points for audiences who might find the original texts challenging, encouraging further exploration of classic literature.

6. Conclusion

Media adaptations play a crucial role in ensuring the continued relevance of classic literature in a rapidly changing world. By reframing these works through innovative visual and narrative strategies, filmmakers create new ways for contemporary audiences to engage with stories that might otherwise seem distant or outdated. While the process of adaptation inevitably involves reinterpretation and transformation, it also allows for a deeper exploration of the themes, characters, and cultural significance of classic literature. As long as filmmakers continue to find new ways to reimagine these iconic texts, classic literature will remain a vital part of our cultural landscape, accessible to audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Disclosure statement

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About the author

Diya Abraham has a degree in Media Studies from Christ University, Bengaluru, Idia. Her research interest lies on the intersection of adaption studies and digital media studies.

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The Nigerian Media's Role and Constraints to Effective Counter-Terrorism: A Discourse Study

Aghogho Imiti[1*]

Delta State University, Nigeria

Elo Ibagere[2]

Delta State University, Nigeria

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Abstract

Terrorism is a global threat, and combating it has equally become a global concern. The phenomenon has become a weapon of religious extremists, who use it to draw attention to themselves and to promote their beliefs and propaganda through the media, just as the media give their activities prominence. Significantly, the Nigerian media, like those of other countries, have inadvertently become allies of terrorists, who rely on the media to increase their popularity. This study sees this as a dysfunction that the Nigerian media must reposition against in their daily reports in order to change the narrative. Through a content analysis, the study qualitatively analyzed three Nigerian newspapers that were purposively sampled and unraveled how the media accorded Boko Haram importance in their daily reports. This is done against the backdrop of Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT). The result shows *Vanguard* newspaper leading by an unassailable number with 14 (66.7%) out of 21 dysfunctional reports in the period under study. The study concluded by discussing ways of obviating the trend in Nigeria.

Keywords

Boko Haram, counter-terrorism, media constraints, Nigeria, Nigerian media, terrorism

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7319-1843 | laimiti@delsu.edu.ng
[2] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9547-8848 | eloibagere@delsu.edu.ng

[*] Delta State University, Nigeria.

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1. Introduction

The issue of terrorism has been and is still a matter of global concern (Adesina & Kanmodi, 2019; Carberry, 1999; Shughart, 2006). Over the years, the phenomenon has expanded to cover virtually all countries and continents of the world, as noted by António Guterres, United Nations Secretary General (UNODC, 2018). The Institute for Economics and Peace (2020), in its catalogue, lists 166 terrorist-affected countries, cutting across all continents, with Nigeria ranking as the third worst hit after Afghanistan and Iraq. Just as Chalk (1996, p. 25) reports that "between 1968 and 1989, a total of 10925 international terrorist incidents were recorded by the US State Department", as attacks increased on a yearly basis as well as having a wide spread. It is, therefore, not an overstatement to say that the phenomenon has assumed a global dimension since it "is not restricted to any one region, state, or jurisdiction" (Carberry, 1999, p. 686). Terrorism has also piqued the interest of major world powers, which have also become targets of terrorists.

However, a new global threat emerged with the arrival of the al-Qaeda Islamic movement, led by Osama Bin Laden, whose aim was to entrench its type of Islam as the global religion (Byman, 2003). The group's methods include suicide bombings that have taken the lives of thousands of people, in addition to the decapitation of those who do not subscribe to its faith, the footage of which they broadcast. Thus, it was simply a question of time before other groups sprung up using similar methods. These later groups include al-Shabaab of Somalia, al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), which bestrides North Africa, and Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram in Nigeria (Ukonu et al., 2021), which is the main focus of the current study .

This study agrees with previous summations that the media, consciously or unconsciously, influence and boost the activities of terrorists through the publicity they accord them (Meeus et al., 2018; Pfeiffer, 2012; Tulga, 2020; Weinstein, 2018). However, it may not be inappropriate for the media, society's watchdog, to discharge their core corporate social functions of surveillance of the environment, correlation and dissemination of information, sensitizing, and raising public awareness on issues affecting society, especially when it concerns security. Thus, bringing information about terrorist attacks to the public may raise awareness about the sect's activities, inform and direct members of society, as well as assist security agencies that require such information for counter-terrorism purposes. For instance, the press brought to the public's knowledge the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls in Borno State and the Forestry College students in Kaduna, Nigeria, among other attacks by the Boko Haram sect (Ajumobi, 2021; Zenn, 2014).

Actual terrorism in Nigeria, which is traceable to the emergence of Boko Haram, an Islamic group, started at the beginning of the 21st century (Adelaja et al., 2018; Okpevra, 2012), and has ever since followed global trends (Imhonopi & Urim, 2016). It all began with religious agitation by the Boko Haram sect, which erupted from Northern Nigeria. At the onset, the group was aided by political gladiators who relied on them for election victory (Afzal, 2022). Since its formation, the group has sought not just the imposition of its type of Islamic religion on the whole of Nigeria, but also to compel others into embracing its brand of Islamic ideology, which includes, among other things, a rejection of Western education

(Onuoha, 2012; Oraegbunam, 2016; Thurston, 2016). This latter objective has led the group to channel its attacks on places of worship and educational institutions (Afzal, 2022; Ajumobi, 2021; Onuah & Eboh, 2011). However, with the arrest and killing of the group's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in 2009, the movement metamorphosed into a full-fledged terrorist organization and was subsequently designated as such in 2013 by the Nigerian government (Usman, 2013).

Like any previous terrorist, Boko Haram draws its members primarily "from disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children" (Onuoha, 2014, p. 3). It has similarly continued to rely on its discursive power, which is believed to be "omnipresent in all media forms" (Liu, 2024, p. 25), to shape and influence ideas on the media space. This allows Boko Haram to disseminate its cant and terror as well as recruit adherents into its fold (Peresin, 2007). Apart from its murderous methods of beheading and stoning its victims to death, this group also records its activities, which it lures the media into broadcasting. The sect also posts footage of Abubakar Shekau, its leader, boasting of his invisibility and success in battles with government forces on the internet. For instance, in April 2014, after the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, a video clip of Shekau claiming responsibility for the kidnap and mocking Nigerians emerged on the BBC network (BBC, 2014). Local news outlets likewise reported such brutality. Marin (2011) argues that the media offer terrorists prominence but often remove the propaganda content that they would want to see. This claim is flawed in Nigeria's situation, as the Nigerian media, whose daily reports on Boko Haram attacks, as noted above, have given the group the impetus to continue their terrorist attacks. By broadcasting the aforementioned footages (most times, propaganda), it is adduced that some impressionable unemployed youths would be lured to enlist as members of the group since they believe the group is gaining an advantage.

This study acknowledges Weimann's (2015), Blaker's (2015), and Sinkó's (2021) research in this regard. These studies offer the admissions of several impressionable youths (males and females) who were persuaded to join terrorist groups (ISIS and Boko Haram) either by playing a supporting role or fighting side-by-side with other terrorists after being influenced by watching terrorist activities on YouTube and other media.

Again, the Nigerian media (print and electronic), most privately owned, seem to further aid the activities of the terrorist group. Prior to the deregulation decree 38 of 1992, the government had complete control of the media, establishing them in various regions and states for its own benefit. However, the 1992 broadcast deregulation offered individuals the opportunity to set up their own media agencies. As of today, there is a large number of privately-owned media outfits in Nigeria (Ekeanyanwu & Olaitan, 2009). While this unbundling of the media from the exclusive control of the state is a welcome development, as it fosters the dissemination of information, it has also provided a gateway for privileged individuals or groups to establish media outfits for the purpose of disseminating personal ideologies. Additionally, as the media have regional outlook (based on the two major divisions of southern and northern Nigeria), news reportage on Boko Haram attacks seems to be sensationalized for the interest of members of the immediate environment, as news is relative to the square of distance (Tuñez & Guevara, 2009). This gives

credence to Chermak and Gruenewald's (2006) summation that the majority of terrorism attacks receive no or little media publicity, although a few reported cases are sensationalized in the press.

The foregoing therefore reinvigorates the call for extra-sophisticated counter-terrorism measures by the Nigerian media to curtail the spread of Boko Haram. The Nigerian mainstream media, not excluding the new media, no doubt, have a significant role in the counter-terrorism effort of the government. Here lies the crux of this study.

2. Theoretical framework

The main issue of concern in this paper is how information about terrorist activities are leaked to the public, especially impressionable Nigerian youths who become convinced to become terrorists. This concern also includes how these youths turn out to be vicious extremists. Over the decades, significant research has been carried out with relevant submissions made on how information is spread in the society. Most significant in this regard is that of Everett Rogers (1995), who terms the means of spreading information in society as the diffusion of innovations. Rogers (1995, p. vii) characterizes innovation as "an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption". Explaining further, Rogers (1995) views diffusion as a social procedure in which individually perceived information about a new idea is communicated. The meaning of an innovation is therefore steadily mapped out through a procedure known as "social construction" (Rogers, 1995, p. vii). It is hereby equally pointed that the introduction of any medium into any society triggers changes in such a society. Hence, "most observers agree that the internet and the World Wide Web have grown at a more rapid rate than any previous medium" (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 376).

The fact of media helping to diffuse innovations comes into focus negatively with regards to terrorism, as advancement in media technology has equally aided the dissemination of the phenomenon and aided recruitment (Ogbondah & Agbese, 2018). Hoffman (2016) and Wilkinson (2001) have in fact posited that media and terrorism operate symbiotically. Hoffman, in his analysis, uses three eras of revolution in mass communication to explain further. He maintains that the invention of the printing machine enabled the Narednarya Volye and other anarchists to spread communist messages in the 19th century. Secondly, the introduction of television satellites in the US in 1968 signaled the birth of international terrorism. Also, the birth of the internet, which changed the style of news presentation, resulted in further sophistication of terror acts in the world. What can best buttress Hoffman's assertion in our situation is the emergence and spread of Boko Haram. While the major concern of this research is the manner in which Nigerian newspapers report terrorist activities, the internet cannot be completely left out as most Nigerian newspapers are hosted on the internet and are accessible online. Undoubtedly, the wide acceptance and use of the internet with other social media platforms are giving impetus to the audacity of the terrorists in coordinating their activities as well as publicizing their carnage (Damphousse & Smith, 1998). These activities were relatively unknown before the popularity of these innovations. This further supports the assertion that media revolutions will trigger change in the society. Sandre (2017) has equally noted the statement of Rex Tillerson, former US Secretary of State, that, "as we have seen, from attacks in Nice,

Berlin, Orlando, and San Bernardino, the internet is ISIS best weapon for turning a recruit into a self-radicalized attacker".

According to the above-mentioned quotation, the media seems to be dysfunctional. Media become dysfunctional when the objective of their content is defeated, and what consumers get are such elements capable of causing panic, lowering of taste, and inducing narcotization of certain deviant behavior through overexposure and overemphasis of negative information. The goal here is to eliminate media dysfunction as it relates to terrorism, as it may be completely out of place for the media not to report terrorists' attacks. Such media reportage raises awareness of the sect's activities, informs members of society, and provides security agencies with information. The reality is, however, that media revolutions and the proliferation of smartphones have resulted in negative developments in society. Most Nigerian youths now have these gadgets and have access to the internet. This gives them access to information online, just as the media now place their news content online. Terrorists have also used this technology to gain unrestricted access to information. This view is substantiated by Seib, as cited in Marin (2011, pp. 254-255), who avers that the media have facilitated a drastically increased flow of information so much that, "wherever terrorists have attacked or gained a foothold, the many facets of extremism have become inextricably linked to media technologies and networks". Since media professionals, in their various approaches, may not be purveying negative content deliberately, there is the need for them to act in collaboration with other authorities to evolve strategies that should deny terrorists the advantage of utilizing the media to actualize their mission. It is equally important that the Nigerian media avoid undue coloration of news content about Boko Haram's success and map out plans to exclude its propaganda messages from their daily reports to demoralize the group and sever their conduit pipe for further recruitment.

3. Method

The study is based on a content analysis of three major Nigerian newspapers, purposively sampled for their coverage of Boko Haram attacks and presumed victories over the Nigerian Army, which in turn contributed to boosting the sect's morale. The newspapers are *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, and *Vanguard*. These selected dailies are privately owned, have divergent opinions on national and political affairs, which makes their news content vary (Anyanwu et al., 2022; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009). They are also widely circulated, as they are found in every nook and cranny of the country, besides their online visibility. Campbell (2016) confirms that *Punch* and *Vanguard* are among the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria reporting on Boko Haram.

The sample of the study includes all reports on the defeat of the Nigerian Army by Boko Haram published by these newspapers between January 2018 and April 2022. The search term was restricted to "Boko Haram" as terms like bandits, insurgents, militia, and terrorists were not included. The news contents were sourced from the internet, using Google search, on the subject with a keyword search of "Boko Haram kills Nigerian army" and the particular name of the newspaper included. For instance, "Boko Haram kills Nigerian army, *Vanguard news*. The search result, repeated three times, yielded 157 related stories. *Vanguard* had 67, *The Punch* had 53, and *The Guardian* had 37. Of these stories, 21 reports were

based on Nigeria's military defeat by the Boko Haram sect. These reports were either featured as the lead stories on the front/cover page, riders, breaking news, or inside stories**.**

4. Results and discussion

All three sampled newspapers, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, and *Vanguard* had some degree of reporting on the war between the Nigerian Army and the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria and on the conquest of the Nigerian Army by the sect. The reports range from "Nigerian soldiers killed in Boko Haram raid", "Boko Haram militants kill 17 Nigerian soldiers", "Boko Haram...overrun Nigerian army base", "Shock, as terror attack on Army base claims 17 soldiers", "Army commander, 20 soldiers killed as Boko Haram ambush Nigerian army", to "Boko Haram fighters kill another army commander". However, of the 21 issues on the defeat of the Nigerian Army, *Vanguard* newspaper reported 14 (66.7%) defeats on the following dates, months, and years: 9 Aug. 2018, 1 Sept. 2018, 21 Nov. 2018, 29 Nov. 2018, 5 Jan. 2019, 9 Feb. 2019, 18 Feb. 2019, 18 Jul. 2019, 1 Sept. 2019, 22 Feb. 2020, 24 Mar. 2020, 30 Sept. 2020, 25 Sept. 2021, and 6 Apr. 2022. *The Punch* newspaper reported 5 (23.8%) cases in the following order of date, months, and years: 18 Feb. 2019, 15 Jun. 2019, 29 Mar. 2020, 17 May 2020, and 6 May 2021. *The Guardian* newspaper reported 2 (9.5%) issues on 9 Aug. 2018 and 2 Apr. 2019.

Moving forward, in the period under study, *Vanguard* newspaper topped the media with the most dysfunctional reports, accounting for 66.7%. In the years 2018 and 2019, it reported 4 and 5 issues respectively, 2020, 3, and 1 each for 2021 and 2022. This is followed by *The Punch*, which reported 23.8% of issues between 2019 and 2022. It reported 2 cases each in 2019 and 2020 and 1 dysfunctional report in 2021. The 2 cases reported by *The Guardian*, which account for 9.5% of the total, were recorded, 1 each, in the year 2018 and 2019.

There was a tally in the frequency of reports by *Vanguard* in the months of November, 2018 and February, 2019, as it reported 2 cases each within the space of about ten days (21 and 29 Nov. 2018; 9 and 18 Feb. 2019). Also, the years 2018–2019 had 13 reported cases by all newspapers. This frequency in reportage was as a consequence of the volume of assaults on the Nigerian military by the Boko Haram sect in that period. Within the aforementioned years, 174 deaths were reported from Boko Haram attacks targeted at the military in Nigeria (Sasu, 2022). *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers reported 8 cases between 2020 and 2022, while *The Guardian* newspaper reported none.

A critical evaluation of the reports shows no significant date of convergence, as the dates of the reports vary. The only dates of convergence were 9 August 2018, when *Vanguard* and *The Guardian* newspapers reported an attack with a similar capture, "Boko Haram militants kill 17 Nigerian soldiers", and 18 February 2019, where *The Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers published another story. While *The Punch* reports it as "Boko Haram kills army officer, three soldiers in Yobe", *Vanguard* captures it as "Boko Haram kills 3 soldiers, one officer".

The data presented above highlight a significant issue with how Nigerian media cover Boko Haram's activities. Contrary to Chermak and Gruenewald's (2006) summation that the majority of terrorism attacks receive no or little media publicity, the above reports show that Boko Haram carnages receive media publicity in Nigeria. This affirms the summations of Meeus et al. (2018), Pfeiffer, (2012), Tulga (2020), Weinstein (2018), and Wilkinson (2001) that media coverage of terrorist acts, whether consciously or unconsciously, aids, influences, and boosts their morale. This, in turn, inspires the sect to remain unrelenting, recruit supporters, and continue further assaults. This equally corroborates Browne and Silke's (2010) study, which posits that those who use the media extensively and communicate compelling messages have a substantial likelihood of success. Consequently, the greater the Nigerian media disseminate Boko Haram sect's victories over the Nigerian army, the more they enhance their popularity and perceived invincibility.

Interestingly, of the 37 general news contents sourced from *The Guardian*'s website using the key phrase "Boko Haram kills Nigerian army, *The Guardian news*", the newspaper had more reports on the success of the Nigerian Army over the Boko Haram sect. Though *Vanguard* and *The Punch* reported some of these positives, *The Guardian* had more. Reports of this nature, as presented by *The Guardian*, are what is expected of the Nigerian media in the fight against terrorists in order to demoralize them. This is the role, among others, of the mass media in the counter-terrorism process, as inferred by Browne and Silke (2010). This implies that if the Nigerian media continue in this regard, the sect will be demoralized. This is further discussed in the foregoing.

4.1. Mass media and counter-terrorism

Counter-terrorism is any act that is intended to prevent any terrorist act or eradicate such an act or terrorist group. Since terrorism affects the world in general, counter-terrorism should be the responsibility of any person who is neither a terrorist, nor a sympathizer of terrorism. Antonio Guterres, United Nations (UN) Secretary General, during the high level conference of heads of counter-terrorism agencies in June 2018, obliquely declared that it is a collective duty for nations to come together to establish a troubled-free world with enhanced security and dignity, laced with opportunity for all individuals in order to deprive terrorists of the medium needed to spread their vile ideologies (United Nations, 2018).

The function of the media—be they private or public—in the context of the above, as asserted by Guterres, is crucial as they have been inferred to be in a symbiotic relationship with terrorists. Peresin (2007, p. 11) notes this when he states that "terrorism and the media are bound together in a specific way and complement each other". While the terrorists, by their activities provide content for the media, the media, by purveying the information, give impetus to the terrorists who then believe that they are popular. The media are, therefore, saddled with the onerous task to be in the vanguard of counter-terrorism.

What the media can do towards effective counter-terrorism should be conceived from their performance in view of the ever-increasing wave of the occurrence of terrorism as it transcends borders, religions, and cultures. Terrorist organizations usually orchestrate their acts so they could be noticed, and "in the

majority of cases, they are carried out precisely in order to draw the attention of international media...which, thanks to the media, participates collaterally in every terrorist attack" (Peresin, 2007, pp. 6-7).

The above shows the extent to which the media have inadvertently aided the perpetration of terrorism, which is a lamentable dysfunction. In fact, Peresin (2007, p. 7) has equally observed that, "modern media technology and communication satellites have had a marked effect in increasing the publicity". The UNODC (2018, p. 5) further notes that, "the development of mass communication technologies allowed news, learning, ideas and events to be rapidly communicated across long distances", which invariably serve as motivation to individuals or groups, irrespective of their location. This adds credence to Rogers' (1995) discourse on how technology facilitates the spread of information in society, which he referred to as the diffusion of innovations and the popular cliché of the "world being a global village".

In the same vein, Burke (2016, p. 16) equally adds the role of the print media "and other forms of dissemination capable of carrying the news of a given terrorist act to large numbers of people". The fact of media drawing the attention of terrorists and terrorists drawing media attention is well noted and cannot be underestimated. Most importantly, the media aid the activities of terrorists through publicity. When terrorists' attacks are aired or given prominence, just as *The Punch* and *Vanguard* reported, it tends to validate the claim of such terrorists that they are still relevant and can inflict harm to any target of their choice. This tends to show the helplessness of the government in its wish to protect the people. Therefore, targeted populations would have no option but bow to the dictates of such terrorists, because to do otherwise would result in their being victims of deadly attacks. In such situations, passions would be inflamed and because victims of such attacks do not have the means to defend themselves, anger could be directed against the government. Such is the situation in Nigeria, whereby the people in Benue, Zamfara, Taraba, Kaduna, and Sokoto continue to fault the government's response to security issues (Umoru et al., 2022). This becomes disturbing, as even the Christian populace has accused the Federal Government of tacitly supporting terrorist acts because the president is a Muslim (Fasan, 2020). In fact, Afzal (2022), Dunn (2018), and Mohammed (2021) unequivocally note that the violence in the mentioned states is perpetrated by those with Islamic background. Its tactics and triumphant shout of *Allah wah kubar* (God is great) after a successful attack support the above claim (Mohammed, 2021). While the broadcast or publication of the people's despondent reaction may present their plight before the public, it may equally help the cause of terrorists, as they would use such despondency to recruit a few people who have lost confidence in the government into their fold.

Again, politicization of issues of security (Henry, 1993; Pérouse de Montclos, 2021) has equally placed the media on the podium of attention, especially at this period of the nation's history when there is the threat to its unity. The media organizations seem now to be in a dilemma regarding their role or which side of the divide they should belong. Hate speeches continue to be disseminated, causing disaffection. This gives impetus to terrorists who exploit the trend to cause more havoc. For example, when Christians claim that Muslims are killing them (Adelakun, 2017; Ashaka, 2020), Boko Haram would receive a boost because it shows that they are succeeding in their quest. The government has eventually taken interest in

curtailing hate speech broadcast because of its damaging potential. For instance, El-Rufai, former Governor of Kaduna State, while in office as Governor in 2017, suggested during a television program, *Sunrise Daily* on Channels Television (28 February 2017) that continued broadcast of ethnic clashes involving herders and locals of Southern Kaduna was frustrating peace efforts because such broadcast features hate speeches. It becomes imperative for the media as well as communication professionals to survey, correlate, and sieve their news content before dissemination.

The foregoing places an enormous responsibility on the Nigerian media—private and public—which are expected to play a leading role in counter-terrorism efforts. This role relates to the manner they purvey information in order to avoid dysfunction, especially through inducing wrongful interpretation of messages about terrorism.

4.2. Nigerian media's role in counter-terrorism

The nation's media obviously have a leading role to play in counter-terrorism. The UN office of Counter-Terrorism in its Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2016 adopted four-pillar plan. This includes:

1. Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism
2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism
3. Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in this regard
4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism (United Nations, 2006).

The Nigerian media should key into the UN strategy as stated above. This should involve all media platforms, including the new media. The American based Bipartisan Policy Center, BPC, (2018) has previously noted that radicalization depended on personal contacts with those that eventually got recruited as Jihadists, but that technology now enables "terrorists to communicate radicalizing messages to a far wider circle of potential adherents than they could have reached with traditional media" (BPC, 2018, p. 4).

Another measure the media can take that is advocated by the BPC (2018, p. 7) is "counter-messaging", which means "attempting to refute or undercut the messages propagated by terrorist groups and their sympathizers" (BPC, 2018, p. 7). In addition to counter-messaging, the Nigerian media, through proper gate-keeping, can help the cause of counter-terrorism by halting publications or broadcasts that may give public relevance to terrorist activities. This would make the terrorists unpopular. For example, all 21 stories reported by the Nigerian dailies under study on the defeat of the Nigerian Army by the Islamic sect ought not to be given any place in the media. This is what Marin (2011) refers to as omitting the propaganda message. In this regard, newspaper headlines such as "Nigerian soldiers killed in Boko Haram

raid", "Boko Haram militants kill 17 Nigerian soldiers", "Boko Haram...overrun Nigerian army base", "Army commander, 20 soldiers killed as Boko Haram ambush Nigerian army" (Ajaja, 2020; Erunke, 2018; Vanguard, 2020) reported within the period under study by the sampled newspapers, should not have been given prominence, as this could boost the morale of the terrorists, as they would see this as a successful adventure. Therefore, the media should deemphasize any information that may add relevance to terrorists or their activities.

Furthermore, the media should intensify the broadcast and publication of messages showing the defeat of terrorists or the routing of their activities, as noticed in *The Guardian*'s report. This would dampen their morale and discourage would-be adherents from joining their fold. In this way, the media would be serving the principal mainstay of the technique enunciated by the UN office of Counter Terrorism, by making the conventional media space very awkward for the terrorists.

Media personnel can contribute to the structure of the state's ability to forestall terrorists' activities by assisting the security agencies in intelligence gathering. By virtue of their profession, which guarantees them access to certain places, they can assist the security agencies in gathering information regarding terrorists' movements, locations, and general logistics. Such information should not be made public but only available to concerned security forces for counter-terrorism purposes. This will enable them to combat terrorism, as they can be pre-empted or routed.

4.3. Challenges confronting the Nigerian media

Counter-terrorism efforts are dangerous since terrorism, as has been noted, transcends territorial boundaries, irrespective of religion or culture. The media, therefore, would be placing themselves at grave risk when they occupy the vanguard of counter-terrorism efforts. They must not only ensure the safety of their personnel, but also that of their infrastructure. This is because, apart from ordinary citizens, the media and their personnel are veritable targets of terrorist. A case in point is *This Day* newspaper, whose office in Abuja was destroyed by a Boko Haram bomb on 26 April 2012, for perceived criticism of its activities (*Premium Times,* 2012). This act has the sole objective of inducing fear in media personnel and coerces them to refrain from disseminating negative reports about the group. A situation like this has the capacity of reducing the media's commitment to counter-terrorism efforts of the government. Media professionals would be afraid to venture into areas where vital information could be obtained and utilized to boost counter-terrorism efforts.

One fundamental constraint confronting Nigerian media in their counter-messaging effort is their language of expression inadequacy. Butler (2017) of the *Associated Press* notes that, "engaging in theological discussions on social media with people who are well versed in the Quran is not for beginners". This indicates that the media personnel, even if they are Muslims may not effectively counter the Islamic ideology as espoused by the terrorists who have a vast knowledge of the history, ideas and traditions of the Muslim world.

One of the greatest hurdles currently confronting the Nigerian media in their counter-terrorism effort is faced on the social media. The various social media platforms are out rightly out of the control of the Nigerian government. Burke (2016, p. 17) notes that "until around 2004, the internet played a minor role in Jihadist militancy". Today, the media, especially new media have become the most formidable weapon at the disposal of terrorists. These media are, no doubt, owned by private individuals and so are not subject to legal controls. Terrorists find them attractive because messages can be sent individually and privately without the knowledge or control of relevant authorities. Worse still, terrorists "quickly create new accounts to replace those suspended and they equally post materials on multiple places including, ironically, on sites that host it for purposes of counter-terrorism analysis" (BPC, 2018, pp. 11-12). Control of these messages is thus a formidable challenge. The media have no influence over the messages and even more, along these lines, there is no law that regulates the social media or restricts access to them. Thus, today, improvement in technology continues to embolden terrorists who have now adopted the Gopro camera "which allows a single individual to film point-of-view images, produce and broadcast content" (Burke, 2016, p. 19). This has widened the extent of challenges the media now have to face in their counter-terrorism effort.

4.4. Responding to these constraints

The difficulties confronting the Nigerian media, as enumerated above, are quite formidable. Assistance is required from some other quarters to address or surmount them. Nevertheless, the media can begin the process by adopting certain steps, which can aid their counter-terrorism effort.

First, media organizations should increase security around their infrastructure just as their staff. Personnel deployed to sensitive and dangerous areas should have their identity protected from the knowledge of terrorists, for them not to be easy targets. Such a step could have averted the bombing of *This Day* newspaper organization.

Media organizations should also cooperate with the government and other law enforcement agencies to minimize, if not remove, extremists' violent messages from their daily offerings. Viewed from the findings, *The Guardian* newspaper is in the lead in this regard, as it has just two reports on the Nigerian Army's defeat by the Boko Haram in the period under study. Collaboration with government is a good step in counter-terrorism. This has been done in the US and Europe. The BBC (2016) notes that in June 2016, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft took a decision with the European Union (EU) to strictly stick to a code of conduct for combating illegal online hate speech. Before then, in February 2016, Twitter had suspended a hundred plus accounts within mid-2015 for perceived aiding of terrorist acts. In further response to the accord with the EU, between January and June 2017, Twitter "suspended almost 300 000 terrorists' accounts of which 75% were blocked before their first tweet" (Weise, 2017). Sometime ago, the Nigerian government decided to collaborate with the media in this regard. Lai Mohammed, former Nigerian Information Minister, revealed that the conventional media have signed on to the mission against counterfeit phony news and hate speech, advising Nigerians that, "before sharing information on

Facebook, Twitter or Whatsapp [they should] always ask how credible the source is" (Okafor, 2018, p. 14).

If possible, too, the media similarly ought to engage the services of well-versed clerics to counter the submissions of the insurgents who are religious fundamentalist. This would solve the problems of inadequacy in language of expression. A well-versed cleric countering the submission of Abubakar Shekau, for instance, would dissuade those convinced by the group's propaganda from joining them. Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, a renowned northern Islamic scholar, has been making frantic efforts in this direction. He has been visiting Boko Haram camps and serving as a liaison between the insurgents and the government. He was instrumental in the release of the kidnapped March 2021 Forestry College students in Kaduna State, and he equally stated on air that he had talked the Islamic terrorists out of killing other of their victims (Ochieng & Kiriungi, 2021). Both public and private media outfits could key into this by allotting to him a column or program segment, where he could apply Islamic teachings to deter members and intending recruits of the sect, since he is highly venerated.

The Nigerian media, too, should cease giving prominence to Boko Haram and other terrorist acts by eliminating the propaganda content they seek to disseminate. This would render such groups irrelevant just as their influence over the media is reduced. These steps would definitely aid the Nigerian media in their counter-terrorism effort. They cannot viably tackle the challenges they face without support. Government, agencies, and even individuals should support them in their effort towards effective counter-terrorism.

5. Conclusion

The discussion focused on the Nigerian medias' role and constraints to effective counterterrorism. It specifically focused on the Nigerian print medium and Boko Haram. This study, conducted through a content analysis of three selected privately-owned Nigerian national dailies, disclosed 21 dysfunctional reports within the period of January 2018 to April 2022 that should not have given prominence. It was noticed that the battle to curtail terrorism, that is, counter-terrorism, is by no means an easy one. It is like catch-22 situation. For, as Hoffman (2016, p. 4) has rightly noted, "the US-led war on terrorism has now lasted longer than [her] participation in both world wars" and that it has surpassed [her] active military involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s". The fact has been well established and does not need further proof to say that terrorism is presently a global phenomenon. Terrorists aim to spread their ideology across the entire world. It is obvious that the best means of spreading their propaganda today and also inducing fear in the people and coercing them to accept their ideology is through the media, which, through their dissemination of information on insurgents' activities to the public, consciously or unconsciously offer them platforms by which they can reach their targets and radicalize them. It was stated that Nigerian media professionals must collaborate with other authorities, especially security agencies, to develop strategies that prevent terrorists from exploiting the media to further their objectives. This is particularly important since media professionals may not intentionally spread harmful information, given the diverse techniques used by terrorists. With a robust synergy, the national media can assist the

security agencies in gathering information regarding terrorists' movements, locations, and general logistics. Such information should not be made public but only available to concerned security forces for counter-terrorism purposes. Since this war cannot be waged by the media alone, it is essential that they receive support from the government, as well as from organizations and individuals who oppose terrorism. If the challenges so far enumerated, are tackled accordingly, the Nigerian media would be able to play their role effectively towards effective counter-terrorism and Boko Haram terrorist activities would be effectively curtailed or completely eliminated.

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About the authors

Aghogho Lucky Imiti, PhD is a scholar in the field of Theatre and Media Studies in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria, where he teaches Theatre and Media courses. His areas of interest include, but not limited to, Media Arts, Film Theories and Criticism, Theatre and Cultural Studies, Dramatic Literature and Criticism. He has authored and co-authored a handful of articles, published locally and internationally.

Elo Ibagere, PhD is a Professor of Theatre and Media Arts at the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He lectures Film, Communication and Media Arts Studies, Playwriting and Dramatic Literature. He is widely read and published in local and international journals and has contributed chapters in books. He is currently the Provost, Faculty of Law, Delta State University, Oleh Campus.